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Be Of Good Heart

A Plea for Christian Optimism

BY

Joseph McSorley
OF THE
PAULIST FATHERS

Senior Novitiate



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Be of Good Heart:
A Plea for Christian Optimism

CHAPTER I

May I Then Hope?

O SOUL, too quickly despondent, too easily cast down, listen to the comforting word of the great Apostle,

“We are saved by hope.”

It is a rallying cry, a trumpet-call, turning defeat into victory. Inspired, inspiring, it awakens a sense of danger, arouses new energy, directs our efforts. Hope is in truth our need; without it we are lost.

Too often when we step across the threshold into the beginning of a new period of life, as at the New Year, or upon a birthday, we find ourselves con-

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fronted by solemn, even saddening thoughts. Like other years which have passed, this coming year will doubtless be a time of trial and struggle; and already we feel an uneasy foreboding as to its mysterious content. We look out as a mariner upon an uncharted ocean; we face forward as soldiers on the eve of battle, thinking of the morrow, whose sunset we may never see. Other years, opening like this one, have brought suffering such as we pray God we may never endure again. Men have faced a new year as we face this, and before its close they have gone down to crushing defeat and everlasting ruin.

These reflections make the threshold of a year an ominous thing. Around it gather suggestions of unmeasured, and therefore dreadful, dangers. We throw back a glance at the disappointments of the past; we peer uncertainly into the future; and not improbably we are overcome with gloom. Will it really be worth while, this year that is

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beginning? Will these approaching months add to the sum-total of our happiness? Can we watch the course of days and weeks as they commence to flow and welcome them as a divine opportunity? Or must we enter upon this year without confidence and without enthusiasm, as men who have no hope?

These are important and very practical questions. And most of us who venture to answer them must acknowledge that we are advancing toward the future with much too faint a heart and with far too weak a courage.

True, this is an age of initiative; and we live in the reign of assurance and self-confidence. People are aggressive and energetic and resourceful and venturesome nowadays; they are restless and quick and ambitious. And our own nation may be said to have attained a sort of pre-eminence in these characteristics; at any rate, no one charges us with lagging very far behind the leaders. Our men are vigor-

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ous; our women are self-reliant; the thoughts we think and the deeds we do are daring. Hardly in any respect are we regarded as timid or diffident or backward.

Yet, curiously enough, and almost as if by way of compensation for our excess of alertness in other respects, we lie open to the charge of a certain sluggishness and faint-heartedness with regard to supernatural opportunities. Observers whose experience is wide and whose discernment is fine, affirm that the tendency to spiritual discouragement is widespread among us; that in things of the soul we easily become downcast and depressed; that we are hypersensitive and exceedingly timid; that for the most part we habitually face the future in a fearful and cowardly mood.

Worldly people there are who, by dint of persistent attempts, succeed in keeping their attention distracted from the perils about to come. They feel no apprehension about the issue of a

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struggle to the approach of which they do not even advert. But the more serious-minded are often perturbed, as they perceive themselves to be entering upon another division of life, drifting so steadily, so inevitably toward the grave, still with untrimmed lamps, still with empty hands. One year has been so like another. Confirmed in habits which are wrong, and set in ways which are evil, we have gone so far, that now nothing short of a divine assurance of better things can dispel the nightmare of despondency, or erase the paralyzing memory of our fruitless, inglorious struggles.

Despondency is widespread. Yet such a temper of mind is anything but wise, anything but healthy, anything but Christian. The outlook of the religious man ought to be that of one whose footsteps lead along the fortunate pathway of Providence and beside the inviting fields of opportunity.

See! Out from each coming day shines the gleam of a coming blessing;

up with each morning's sun there rise new reasons for confidence in the promise given. God is good; He is mighty; His interests are inseparable from ours; His knowledge and His strength are lent us to be employed in our service. Christ is the light of the world. To every one believing in Him He is the sunshine of eternal day. Since He has come, hope springs eternal in the human breast; joy and peace and the glad assurance of everlasting rest are the portion of all who enroll themselves as His disciples.

The true significance of each opening year is that it has come out of eternity to bear to us immeasurable blessings; and as we look forward into each span of time we perceive some fresh evidence of its divine possibilities. Each year will leave us farther along the road to heaven, wrought more closely into the likeness of our Divine Exemplar. This is God's plan. It will be carried out if we do not interfere with it. Therefore is our courage

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high and our heart full of hope. We actually expect eternal happiness to be our lot, and the reflection of that visioned future may be detected shining in the countenance of every Christian saint.

For us, then, this year is a time of promise. We should begin each day with the high spirit of dauntless courage, never with quaking heart. God has promised, and that promise cannot be made void. All we need will be provided. We shall advance; we shall conquer; we shall be guarded against every evil. There shall nothing happen to the least of us—not disappointment, nor sickness, nor failure, nor fault—but that He the Lord God will make it all work together for good. Such, in very truth, is the proper outlook of the Christian.

It is a way of looking at things which for its justification has only to appeal to what our faith in God implies. The purpose of creation, was it not that God might raise us to a divine intimacy with

Himself? And His relation to us, has it ever been, can it ever be, other than that of a father working ceaselessly for the perfecting of the children whom he tenderly loves? The attributes with which we clothe the divine nature make other conceptions than this impossible. God is lovingly and wisely kind; He is gracious and sweet and pitiful and patient.

Read the history of His dealings with men—even with sinful men—and mark the vindication of the claim that there is no end to the mercy of God, no limit to His love. Turn to that clearest revelation of the divine nature, the visible life of Jesus Christ. At once you see the sufficient reason of the Christian's quenchless hope. That Christ should tell the divine story of the prodigal; that of a Magdalen He should make a saint; that in the last hour of His dying agony He should open the gates of Paradise to a sinner just beginning his repentance—these things convince us that if we trust Him to the

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very end we shall make no mistake. But better than all this is the assurance which each of us can find within his own soul. Glance back at the past and recall the patience and the gentleness and the love of our Father as manifested in His words of pardon, forgiveness and comfort to the conscience when, weary with sin or broken with sorrow, we have turned to Him. Does not the very memory of it make us feel that we need never fear, need never question His attitude toward us?

Were there required further confirmation of this belief, we should be able to find it in the actual constitution of the human soul. Hope and confidence are essential to our spiritual well-being. It is impossible to accomplish anything with a soul in which the tide of trust is ever at an ebb, in which the prevailing temper is one of doubt and fretfulness and anxiety. Confidence enters essentially into the chances of success of a soldier marching to the field of battle, of a wrestler leaping forward

to the struggle, of an athlete preparing to run in the race. But much more needful is it in the progress of a soul toward the goal of its highest ambition —heaven.

No less in religion than in therapeutics—or rather much more in the former than in the latter—we recognize that hope is both an element and a condition of healthiness, and that an expectation of success must quicken the heart of him who is to triumph over his enemies. It is in the supernatural as in the natural order, for the religious process is not altogether unlike the physical. What enthusiasm is to the youth and ambition to the apprentice and peace of mind to the invalid, such is hope to the Christian. And as not to know when he is beaten is the characteristic which has made a certain type of soldier famous, so never to believe that God's sufficient help will be withheld from a will which is struggling, however feebly, toward good, is the sentiment which saves a Christian.

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In season and out of season this truth has been preached by the Church, which through the centuries continues to be the great spiritual teacher of the world. Where does she rank hope? Beside faith and charity, as one of that inseparable trinity of virtues without which no man comes to life eternal. The lesson is impressive. No one believes in God as he should, unless to his faith there be united a firm hope. No one loves God as he should, unless together with love there be found in his soul such trust as will cast out fear. When all else has been outgrown there must yet remain these three—faith, hope, and charity. And though, indeed, the greatest of these is charity, we must never allow ourselves to forget that one of them is hope.

As the obligation to hope is a duty too often neglected, so likewise the nature of hope is a matter very frequently misunderstood; the ways and means of fostering hope within the soul seemingly remain unknown to many.

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Now to hope is to expect, to await, to look forward trustfully to the approach of a blessing which one counts upon. In religion it is an expectation of the blessing of eternal life and of the means necessary to obtain it. The Christian whose heart is right expects to be saved; he expects to make progress towards perfection. We need not, at the present moment, insist upon the fact that a rational hope necessarily implies a resolution to be faithful in the discharge of duties and the fulfillment of obligations. That is plain. But the resolution to be faithful must be supplemented by a confidence which will reinforce one's decision to serve God.

All this seems to imply that there is a part to be played by the will in the maintaining of a hopeful state of soul—and this is exactly the point which needs to be insisted upon before all others. People are apt to regard hope as an infused virtue in too strict and exclusive a sense, to assume that grace

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does all and the will nothing in producing hopefulness,—just as in the natural order they assume cheerfulness to be entirely a matter of temperament, overlooking the achievements of those who by persevering effort have first checked and then mastered an emotional tendency to pessimism or despair. The truth is that a man's deliberate choice has a very important function in determining his mental outlook. Hence to a considerable extent every man is responsible for his attitude towards the future.

Which of us really appreciates this as he should? Most are quick to perceive and conscientious to confess faults against the virtue of faith and charity; but few advert to the possibility of committing sin by perversity or sluggishness of will in the matter of hope. Yet there it is, an act to be practised and a virtue to be acquired with the help of a grace which is never wanting.

One may easily sin against hope, then. How? Why how else but by

wilfully dwelling on things which dis-
courage us; by indulging the temptation
to tolerate, if not actually to enter-
tain, the devils of moodiness and de-
pression and melancholy and sadness;
by refusing to take such measures,
physical, mental and religious, as will
help us throw off sentiments no less
favorable to sin than weakening to
virtue.

Faith cure and Christian Science may
be the cloak of many a foolishness and
the cover of many a sham and the ex-
cuse of many an exaggeration, but there
is one truth to which these systems hold
fast—the good old truth that for the
man whose will is right there are no
real evils, that to such as love God all
things work together unto good. In
fact, it is an elementary teaching of the
Church that by God's grace the will
can expel and overcome all the real
evils by which man is afflicted, and,
what is more, can convert every one of
them into a blessing.

Practically, then, how shall we assist

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and cooperate with grace in the matter of acquiring the spirit of hope? We smile, perhaps, when we are told that one of the means is to keep as sane and as healthy as possible. We know that to waste or to abuse the strength of body or mind is wicked. Do we not also know that among the penalties with which the God of nature visits those who disregard His common laws are the nervous and emotional disturbances which bring on continued or periodical depression and moodiness and hopelessness? That this holds true of the greater and grosser sins, we may perhaps have recognized. It is a question if we quite appreciate the degree of our responsibility in the finer and more subtle yielding of our wills to the attractions of selfishness.

This, then, is one of the things we can do, namely, inhibit the excessive consideration of the dark and depressing aspects of life. Further, we can contribute positively to the cultivation of a hopeful temper by retaining before

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our soul's eye, with such permanency as we can achieve, those holy and comforting truths which are the basis of confidence in the future.

A little reflection will convince us that this implies more prayer and less introspection; a looking often at God and seldom at ourselves. Thus we shall soon accustom our minds to contemplate the goodness of the divine nature and the infinite extent of God's mercy and the loveliness of His works; and we shall cease to dwell in a world where we occupy the central place and where our interests are supreme, and walk instead in the company of those whose eyes and minds are fixed lastingly upon God.

Two types of religious men there are, with distinctive traits well defined —the fearful and the hopeful. Which one of them possesses the better chance of victory under stress of temptation, it is surely unnecessary to state. The ideal Christian type has ever included something of the childlike—a face

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which turns toward God as toward a trusted parent, a smile which lasts through the greatest trials and most threatening dangers, a heart which throbs with perfect trust in the goodness of the Father, a spirit which realizes that, though the measure of human frailty be great, the measure of divine mercy is infinitely more, and which rests upon God as a son in his father's arms, as a babe on the bosom of its mother.

As we enter upon each new year, therefore, let it be with high-hearted hope. Here it is before us, a God-given opportunity. This span of days and the experiences which it is to bring have been planned by Providence as a means of grace and blessing to us. Despite all failure in the past, then, we will believe that the coming year is full of good for us; that pleasant and unpleasant things, duties hard and duties easy, trials and sorrows and temptations and surprises and disappointments

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and apparent failures, will prove to be God's means of bringing us to that final victory which above all other goods we most heartily desire.

CHAPTER II

Do Men Believe?

WHY was Christ born?
To bring God and man
together.

Magnificently was that purpose fulfilled. Here, in this common world, a Man among men, Christ dwelt visibly; He grew and labored, He spoke and suffered. A Man from heaven—God among men.

Forever, after the sight of Him, there was stamped upon the imagination of the race an ineffaceable image of perfection. Twisted inextricably into the fibres of the human heart, were new cords of strength, and patience, and supernatural holiness. God had come nearer than ever before; and, in consequence, man was to be for all time greater than ever before.

The history of Christian civilization

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demonstrates this. For all its gloom of shadow and its many streaks of blood, for all its disappointing blindness and hardness, for all its leaden-footed following of heroic leadership and its headlong rush into each new field of gluttony and of lust,—for all this, Christian society, down through the ages, displays the ever present influence of a divine ideal. It shows the blending of God's thoughts and actions with those of men. It proves that Christ never abandoned the race He undertook at any price to save—that He is among us in every time and place, that He is with us here and now. The best that is recorded in the human story, the finest achievements of civilization disclose, like threads of gold, deeds of divine brightness warped through the darker woof, and making a pattern fairer than anything the mind of man could imagine in an eternity.

Since Christ came it has been a different world and a different life. Love and marriage are ennobled; birth and

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death are glorified. The hard tasks that daily fall to labor's lot are softened and sanctified. The care of little ones, the training of the young, the pursuit of knowledge, have become divine vocations; they are among the hallowed things that men and women reverence. We gather for common worship about a Sacrificial Altar and a Table of Mystery, where Christ again is offered up to save from sin, and Christ's body again is broken like bread for souls to feed upon.

All through the ranks of the uncounted millions who have taken to themselves the livery of His Name, there is recognized, now clearly and now dimly, yet universally, an ideal of human relationship which is unique. Bonded by some sort of indescribable fellowship, driven by an unnamed inspiration, men and women accept as an inevitable duty the burden of human service. It is a conception that dawns gradually and in some respects slowly; generations may deny it and individ-

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uals reject it; but in the end it makes itself felt as the necessary consequence of being a Christian. On it goes, widening, deepening the channel of human sympathies, until human love, made pure by the touch of Christ in passing, has flowed into the farthest, murkiest recesses of misery. And lepers, idiots, drunkards and criminals, who have been rescued, rise up and call Him blessed.

Yes! it is scarcely to be denied by the historian—the social order of the Christian world is permeated, illumined, energized, by a force, a light, a power, which in some mysterious, inexplicable way, comes and goes with the coming and going of Christianity. It is the presence of Christ making itself felt in the world.

But, though the traces of His passing are too plain to be ignored; though the world is forever different and better now; still, in each individual life, the process of improvement must forever recommence; and in many an individ-

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ual life little has yet been done.

What may be hoped for by each, is suggested in the prayer breathed by St. Paul, as he thinks of the needs of his dear Ephesians: "That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts."

These words present an ideal of what the life of the Christian should be. It should be a life spent with God. Every moment and every activity, all thought and endurance, all impulse and determination, the earning of one's daily bread, the strife against recurrent temptation, the grief at great bereavement, physical pain and sorrow and joy, strenuous fighting and exultant victory, tender communion and stern performance of heart-breaking duties,—none of these should be apart from God.

Into the grand harmony of the Christian's whole life should be introduced the music of Christ's participation, divinely beautiful, strengthening, dominating. In nothing that he does

can the Christian be quite as other men.

The fulfilling of this idea of constant communion and harmonious cooperation with the Divine Presence is a gift of God; it depends upon a generous grace of His, which we can never do enough to deserve. But it implies another element, too; for the bestowing of the gift is conditioned by the attitude we assume and the response we make. This aspect of the matter needs to be considered very carefully. What is the proper attitude for us to assume when God draws near? What can be done? What must we do?

St. Paul has hinted the answer in one word of his—"faith." We should have faith. And faith is a gift which we must stretch out our hands to receive; it approaches, like a divine guest whom we go forth to meet, and strive heartily to entertain. Faith is at the beginning of holiness. It is the root, indispensable to the growing and the budding and the blossoming of that fair

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flower whose fragrance should be wafted through the garden of our lives. If Christ is going to dwell at all within us, He will begin to dwell by faith.

Faith includes, of course, implicitly or explicitly, every single truth that God has ever taught, or will ever teach. But the particular point of faith which may well be emphasized in connection with the matter now under consideration is belief in the omnipresence of God. In every nook and corner of this visible world, in the midst of the big and little things that make up the daily lives of men and women, at every moment and in every sort of situation, God is near to us, looking upon us, sounding the depths of our consciousness. He is appealing to us, and He is sensitive to our response, to our good conduct or our ill-doing. This is, indeed, the greatest fact of human life; and constant attention to this fact is the substructure of the greatest possible human holiness.

To believe in the constant presence of

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the God who loves us and who, for love's sake, lays a law upon us—to believe in this and to act consistently with such belief, is the most practical general rule of holy living that can be devised. The cultivation of faith in God's omnipresence and the endeavor to behave in a fashion consistent with this faith is, then, the beginning of the preparation for that ideal life of which St. Paul speaks. This, and this alone, will bring us to that state wherein Christ will dwell in our hearts.

To promote this sense of the presence of God, we should make the spirit of reverence habitual. It helps much if we can bring ourselves always to act as if we were within the sanctuary. This is not to say that we are forbidden to rest and relax, to laugh and amuse ourselves; but it is to say that under the surface should be the permanent sense of being in the presence of God. Often, by a word, or even by mere aspiration, a prayer will be offered to the ever-present Lover.

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Temptation will acquire something of the horror of a desecration, a sacrilege.

To keep hold of the great truth; to refuse to let ourselves be drawn away by the vain argument and the fallacy of lying appearances which imply that there is no God—this is the beginning of the holiness which ensures happiness. Remember that great central truth of life, and the remembrance will prepare the soul perfectly for God's best gifts.

Again, we must strive not only to be aware that God is present, but also to act as if His interests were supreme in life. The usual tendency of nature is to put material goods in the first place; and to rank other people after ourselves. We must go straight against this tendency if we would be a fit habitation for the indwelling Christ.

It is not hard to see how different our lives would soon become, if the chief fact of consciousness were the omnipresence of God. It would mean, first of all, the possession of a spirit

of prayer. Prayer is not confined to spoken communication; it is not limited to one or two of the sentiments possible to the human heart. Prayer is well described as conversation with God. How could one be ever conscious of God's presence, and yet refrain from frequent communication with Him? It might concern the great crises of one's life, or the trifling matters of a common day; it might be a petition for the things we need, or thanksgiving for precious favors already received; it might voice the agonized sense of desolation in a soul terribly tried, or the quiet adoration of one telling God simply, "It is good to be here." But at all times, and all places, the soul would be aware that God is within reach of every creature that cries to Him, even in unspoken whispers; and its deep sentiment would be communicated to the closest and dearest Friend, whose sympathy is as certain as His power to help is great.

Nor is it hard to see that, almost

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inevitably, advertence to this dominating Presence would lead to a transmutation of values in our appraisal of things and deeds. The shining baubles of the world look lusterless enough to a man familiar with the radiance of Christ's beauty. Ways of dealing that the world approves of, and that we ourselves once admired, shrivel up into pettiness and meanness if we consider how they appear to God. The custom of driving sharp bargains in shop and market seems impossibly barbaric when we remember that Christ, who erected such different rules of conduct for His disciples, is here present waiting to see whether we are loyal of heart or base traitors. In one word, if we remember that God is looking at us, we are very apt to behave as God wishes.

The soul that trains itself by this method, sooner or later, will receive the blessing which Paul invoked upon the Ephesians: "May Christ dwell by faith in your hearts."

CHAPTER III

What Must I Do?

IT WAS a critical moment in the history of the world when the lawyer, rising up, asked our Divine Lord the question:

“Which is the great commandment?”

So much that is vital in the eternal interests of mankind depended upon the answer. The words about to fall from the lips of Christ would determine the fate of uncounted millions. For His answer was to reveal the divine standard of measurement, was to make plain forever by what rule a man’s life is tested on the Day of Judgment, was to tell us in what things to place our hope of eternal life, and give us an imperishable picture of what in the mind of God a perfect human soul should be.

Our Saviour replies quickly to the

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question. The momentous answer is given in two short phrases which impart the very essence of the spirit of His Gospel, and, like an all-inclusive revelation, sum up the contents of the whole law, disclosing in a flash the most precious element in the relationship of God with man. Henceforward there can be no mistake: the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Love.

The spirit of selfishness is excluded, forever excluded and utterly condemned. The one condition that ensures a man's admission to the Divine Kingdom and guarantees his portion of eternal life is whole-hearted, whole-souled love of God and God's children. The great commandment is this: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. And the second is like to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets.

How it rang through the world, that divine proclamation of the Law of Love uttered by the lips of Jesus Christ,

echoing back into the dim ages of pre-Christian history as if to summon from the dead those nameless and unremembered spirits who in their lifetime fulfilled this law! Flinging into far countries and among undiscovered peoples a revelation that the chance of eternal life was also theirs! Rolling endlessly down the centuries to point the certain way of holiness to all human generations ever to be born! It made no exception and it allowed no excuse, this ruling of the Son of God on the question that concerned His Father's law—a heart-filling, soul-absorbing love of God would imply admission to the heavenly kingdom, even if angels had to guide the perfect lover there.

Once, in the school of an imperfect revelation, emphasis had been laid upon obedience inspired by fear, the tribute of a creature to its Creator. Now the partial illumination, become an all-revealing light, showed heaven and earth in their true relation and

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orientated man to God in the perfect attitude of obedience inspired by love.

Guided by this light men and women were to scale the heights of a holy mountain upon whose summit God awaited them, and were to be admitted to the privileges of an intimacy of affection never imagined possible. And love was to be the all-sufficing condition of this divine bestowal.

Love sufficeth. Race does not matter any more, nor tribe, nor family. Strength and learning shall not avail to save; weakness and ignorance and poverty shall never disqualify. Having fulfilled the one condition of whole-hearted love, the fisherman shall be greater than the scholar and the peasant higher than the king. Even past and repented sin shall be no obstacle; for among the wonderful saints of God are numbered many who, after years wasted in the paths of sin's lowest hell, cast off selfishness at last and became great lovers, valiantly begin-

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ning their painful climb to the far heights of divine union.

It is extremely difficult for the human mind to understand that what God asks of us is simply to love Him. We look high up into the heavens and afar to the ends of the earth, wondering what extraordinary thing we can do in order to win the supreme prize of eternal life. We find it almost beyond belief that what the Lord requires is love and the things that love implies.

Perhaps because so hard for us to realize, the doctrine is repeated over and over again in the pages of the New Testament.

Our Saviour assures the Magdalene that "Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much."

To the scribe affirming the necessity of love, He says: "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

St. Jude receives the promise: "He that loveth Me shall be loved by My Father."

Thus often repeated by our Saviour,

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the same truth is affirmed by St. Paul, and still more frequently by St. John.

Borne in upon the human consciousness by the insistence and the ceaseless repetition of the Gospel teaching, love inspired the new type of holiness which characterizes Christian saints. Whatever other gifts they did or did not possess, whatever other quality set them apart from the common run of men, one thing was unmistakably theirs—love, whole-hearted and supreme.

Down through the centuries a divinely appointed agency preserved the spirit of Christ's teaching. The men and women who went to school to the Catholic Church shared that same exalted conception of the worth of love which marked the first Disciples of Christ and the pupils of Paul and John. If there is any error which would seem to be quite impossible for a Christian to make, it is the folly of attempting to replace love by any substitute, of imagining that great learning, or lip-service,

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or magnificent works can ever have the value of simple love.

Yet, at times, here and there, Christians have gone astray. Implicitly, no doubt unconsciously, a Christian will deny the supremacy of love by concentrating attention exclusively upon the other elements of religion, exercising care to excel in other qualities, measuring nearness to the Kingdom of Heaven by some other attribute or some other achievement. Often and often in the history of the worship of God has this gross mistake been made. It has been made by you and me.

For true love comes not naturally or easily to us who are selfish first by instinct, and then largely by habit, too. We are so much less ready to give than to get. We think it most blessed to receive. We exchange and calculate and barter more contentedly than we give away. We are loth to cast off self-interest and for love's sake undertake the great adventure of abandoning all

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our substance and counting it as nothing.

How often we manifest this spirit of selfishness. When, for instance, temptation confronts us and promises us disloyalty's rich reward, how blind we are to the better worth of simple love. How frequently, surrendering basely to the attack of greedy avarice, or storming passion, or furious hate, we equivalently repudiate and abandon love, deny the truth that Jesus affirmed, follow a false gospel, offer allegiance to Antichrist, discredit the ideal for which our Saviour died.

Against such a mistake, such a betrayal, we must be on our guard. High and clear before our eyes let the fact of love's supremacy be set. Love is the one thing needful. For love is the supreme ideal, the great commandment of the Christian law.

And with love of God must coexist love of the neighbor. The questioning lawyer received a twofold answer which—to our astonishment—sets the

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love of man alongside the love of God so that the holy soul may no more exclude the one than the other. Heartily accepted, this doctrine would remake the world.

This teaching re-echoes through the pages of St. John and St. Paul. John's ceaseless exhortation, "Little children, love one another," and Paul's flaming words in his first letter to the Corinthians, preach the same truth—the excellence of love over every other gift. A practical result of this doctrine was the extraordinary affection of the early Christians for one another, a phenomenon so striking that the very pagans marveled at the depth and sincerity and constancy of their love.

How plainly is the love of our neighbor made the actual test of our love of God.

"By this shall all men know that you are My disciples that you have love one for another."

"Bear ye one another's burdens and so ye shall fulfill the law of Christ."

WHAT MUST I DO?

“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light.”

“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.”

“If any man say I love God and hateth his brother he is a liar.”

Yet with all Christ’s insistence upon His new commandment that we love one another even as He loves us, how blind we are to the fatal consequence of living aloof from the spirit of love. Surely each one of us in his heart must humbly acknowledge shortcomings too plain to be denied. Surely we must confess it a shame and a scandal that with ideals so sublime before our eyes we are so little consecrated to the holy purposes of Christian love, so selfish and inconsiderate and unsympathetic and hard, and even hateful.

Is it not true? Study the life of the average Catholic; take note of the daily conduct of ordinary men and women like you and me. What evidence is there in our lives to show that we have

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heartily accepted the Gospel of love preached by Jesus Christ, that our existence is controlled by the one supreme purpose of growing in love of God and love of our fellowmen? Note our daily routine, our employment of time, our expenditure of money, our tone of speech, the trend of our desires and efforts, the spirit even of our prayers and petitions. Think how we behave when we are overworked, or disappointed, or irritated, or passionate, or humiliated, or threatened with some calamity.

In our lives who can discover the hourly evidence of an overmastering desire to postpone all other things to the cultivation of a deeper love for God and our neighbor? Yet this it is that our hearts would be really set upon, were the words and example of Jesus Christ the model of our daily behavior. We are born brethren of those early Christians who took so literally the admonition of the aged Apostle John when he went about ever saying

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“Little children, love one another.” We are far-off followers of those who lived out the characteristics described by Paul in his wonderful painting of love—patient, kind, un-envying, unsuspecting, without pride or perversity, tirelessly enduring all things and never falling away.

It all suggests that perhaps we are misapplying much effort. Our strivings for salvation have to be redirected. We should pray and labor to become more unselfish, more loving. We must get into the habit of thinking less of ourselves and our own interests. We must acquire the point of view which will enable us to realize that our one chance of being admitted to Christ’s Kingdom lies in our absorbing some of that spirit of self-sacrificing love which drew Him down from heaven to give Himself up entirely for the sake of His Father and His brethren. The same Father and the same brethren are ours. And the thing above all other

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things to be heartily desired is that for love of that Father and those brethren we shall unselfishly live, unselfishly die.

CHAPTER IV

Why Was Christ Born?

THE Christ Child!

What magic in the name!

As if awakened by an angel's singing, we behold the vision—a great host gathered beneath the midnight stars, straining with eyes and hands toward a radiant figure, symbol of all human hopes, all human fears, a newborn Child. Kneeling beside Him, Mary, Maid and Mother, Joseph, husband and father, the Shepherds and the Kings adore.

Familiar faces we see, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Jewish fishermen stand beside Athenian philosophers, Prætorian guardsmen and Nubian slaves. Parthians and Medes and Elamites and inhabitants of Mesopotamia are there,

young and aged, lusty and crippled, the beggar and the king.

Celts and Saxons press forward in the throng, swineherds, monks, serfs, plowmen, jesters; Huns and Goths and Danes, penitent warriors and vikings, converted pirates and freebooters. Children of a later growth too, have come—bishops and knights and artists and scholars and troubadours and merchants and craftsmen from mediæval Umbria and Provence and Castile and Normandy, from the Rhine and Yorkshire and Armagh. And strange pilgrims bring the tribute of the newer world, conquistadores, black-robed missionaries, friars in white and brown and gray, with their neophytes, bronzed Mohawks, sallow Chinamen, pale Eskimos, dusky Filipinos—all crowding the vast spaces to gaze upon the heavenly Infant with adoring eyes.

The vision fades.

And then the mind travels back to that distant day in the infancy of the human race when God first promised

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a Redeemer to our fallen parents, the day when man went out from Paradise, his heart already kindling with a hope never to be extinguished through centuries dark as paganism could make them.

Far and wide his wanderings led, yet no matter to what low brutish level his soul might sink, ever the promise hung still star-like above his unsteady course, ever, benignly shining in the darkness, it saved him from utter despair. The broad world over, amid dull savages in Arctic ice-huts, among far-away, fierce tribes of the South, on trackless mountain ranges and on scorched plains alike—everywhere, man, living upon the dim memory of a divine assurance, dwelt in the hope of a Saviour to come.

To God's chosen people that promise became the foundation of a national faith, the inspiring motive of a heroic struggle against every temptation to abandon hope. Throughout all the varied history of the Jews it shone steady, in the rainbow's splendid colors,

in evening cloud, in sunset star. God had pledged His word; and the midnight horizon of life was finally to be burnished with the glow of dawn. Ever and again by word of seer or saint, the promise bursts out prophetically; by victory and by miracle, it is confirmed. Dream of a God to come! Charm so potent against the demon of despair! Vision that illumines the darkest human experience!

Behold here the fulfillment—simple as the tale told by a child, commonplace as any incident of the passing day. Not with whirlwind, nor with earthquake, nor in fire, but as the breathing of a gentle air was the coming of the Lord—quiet, modest, unimpressive, as the delicate shading of an autumn sunrise noted only by the artist's vigilant senses, as the faint echoing of far-off chimes which only a listening ear detects.

Thus, almost in secret, came the Son of God to earth. The simplicity of it overwhelms us. It is marvelous that

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the Creator of heaven and earth should come to be made man; it is all but incredible that He, the Infinite One, should come so humbly.

Divest the scene of the significance attached by faith. Contemplate it with the eyes of sense alone. Take into account only what is visible and palpable. Nothing will then capture the imagination, nothing startle the emotions. And indeed, we see from the behavior of the people of the time, that the great event of human history passed almost entirely unnoticed. Poet and consul and emperor, too occupied with their own affairs even to heed the report of it, went on their way. They received Him not; yet the Christ Child was their God.

Such was His way of acting in that older day. Such is His way at the present time as well. Even at this moment we may be looking at some wonderful divine event, without recognizing its significance. We may daily be trifling with sublime privileges and

wasting God-given opportunities. The thought suggests a pointed question.

Are we really blind to the deep significance of the Christ Child? Are we content with a conventional notion of what Christmas means? Amid the holly and the green, do our hearts expand with merely human sentiment? Do we impart and receive a joy that is all of the earth, earthy?

If so, then to us, Christian and Catholic though we be, this blessed birth may bring no increase of faith, no deepening of trust, no new growth of love in the service of God. Then we, like the Pharisees, so hard of heart, may look on the God of love and know Him not. Frivolous and unaware, we prattle about our petty interests. We, unto whom is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord, the Wonderful One, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace! Could we but realize all that His coming really implies, we might thereby gain everything that is needed to perfect our unsatisfactory

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lives, to make us fit for close and loving association with God, to render us truly religious.

What is religion? Turning aside from the thought of forms and creed, ceasing for the moment to advert to the Church, her sacraments, her laws, her varied life of devotion, consider what underlies these visible appearances. They are indeed divine means for the obtaining of a divine end; but behind them, an inspiring cause, primary, essential, springing out of the very constitution of humanity and the nature of God, is something that may be regarded as at once the justification and the end of all religion, the vocation of the human soul to enter into loving union with its Maker.

That my soul might finally be united to Himself, is the end God had in view in creating me, in redeeming me, in accomplishing each one of a long series of miracles of grace which He has wrought. My life is utterly useless, my soul will perish hopelessly, if that end

be missed. Every moment of my existence, every thought and word and act of mine, is to be assayed according to the standard of that divine purpose. What makes for union with God is good, noble, holy; what lessens union is vain, base, wicked. The chance of being united with Him, and that alone, explains the true reason of my existence and of the existence of every man created.

The supreme aim of religion, then, is to consummate the union of the soul with God. Religion which does not promise it is an absurdity; religion which does not help to achieve it is a sham.

But dare any religion give us hope of what is so inconceivably beyond both our merit and our power? We men and women, so unimportant, so unlovely, are we sought in love by the Almighty Being who dug out the sea and hung the stars and shaped the course of heaven's flying meteors? Is it credible that He desires to unite us

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with Himself in a union more intimate than any ever realized by human lovers? The thought is overwhelming. Why, many a mortal is so gifted, so famous, so powerful, that we dare not aspire to *his* friendship! Shall we then hope for companionship and loving union with the Omnipotent God? Surely, He is too great—surely, we are too little.

And if ever God seemed oppressively great, in this age more than in any other does He seem so. Of old, people cherished notions that made of God a sort of larger man. With fancies simple as the thoughts of children, with a background painted only half-consciously by the imagination, they pictured Him in the likeness of themselves and appreciated but the smallest part of His power.

A small stretch of land was then the universe; heaven was swung overhead almost within reach; sun and stars were gaps through which celestial light was shining. The God who walked in the

cool of the evening, the God whose messenger could hardly overcome the wrestling Jacob, He, indeed, might confidently be approached.

But today our knowledge of the extent of His creation appalls us. God's image grows greater with every step of advancing science. As the ocean's depths are sounded, wonder is added to wonder. Plant and animal and man daily reveal new miracles, new mysteries. We look into the distant sky, we measure from star to star, and we are overwhelmed by an endless vista in a universe that is infinite. In short the divine majesty has become something we can prove, something we can see and feel, something that strikes home, that weighs upon us and crushes us down with a sense of our own littleness. We know now the greatness of the chasm to be bridged ere man can look upon the Face of God. The noonday of human science blazes out splendidly, but as we look upward our eyes are stricken blind.

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What has religion now to say? Must it not be silent? Blessed, indeed, were the ancients in their child-like faith. We admire their simplicity, and we envy them their boldness of affection. But we, who have been made aware of God's real greatness, on whom there has been impressed so terrifying a sense of His power, we dare not presume to call Him friend. We are struck with wonder; we praise the immensity and the harmony of His work; we cry out proudly with the Psalmist, "Who is a God like unto our God?" But we do not venture to add, "The God of no other nation is so near to them as our God is near to us." Our inheritance of knowledge oppresses us and our sense of the divine magnificence strikes us dumb. Hope is chilled in the heart. God we shall admire; but none of us shall adventure to call Him friend.

Then comes ringing the angel's message: "This day is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." We turn to the crib of Bethlehem, and there, in

swaddling clothes, we behold our God! He, the Everlasting, the Omnipotent, the Infinite, has become, for love's sake, a Creature, a Human Being, the Christ Child on His Maiden Mother's breast.

No word is needed. We look; we realize. Now life is all changed for us. Henceforth, nothing is impossible. There is nothing we may not hope for, since this is true. We can think of no height too high for human aspiration, no depth too low for God to meet us there. Young man and maiden, father and mother, lisping child and elder of three-score years, we kneel beside the Christmas Crib, each confident of welcome. Emmanuel! Emmanuel! God with us. He is not too good, nor too great; He is our Friend and Brother. He has come to abide; yes, to abide always. Through storm of temptation and stress of weakness and weight of sin pressed down upon us, He will be with us still—Jesus, the Christ Child, yesterday and today and the same forever.

CHAPTER V

What Is Wrong with Us?

WHAT was the most critical moment of human history?

Questioned thus, one advertises to a hundred possible answers.

Men come to mind: Alexander, Cæsar, Charles Martel, Washington, Napoleon, Foch. And places: Actium, Poitiers, Lexington, Jutland, Verdun. And pictures: invading hordes, embattled armies, grappling navies wreathed in smoke and flame, forts that vomit death.

Yet none of these gives the answer.

Then discoveries are recalled: gunpowder, printing, the Western World, gravitation, steam, electricity, radio. But thinking of these things we are still wildly, immeasurably astray.

For the greatest crisis of all human history was the moment when "in the

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fullness of time God sent His Son, made of a woman, that we might become adopted sons."

Ponder the richness of meaning contained in those words: "God sent His Son."

Jesus Christ, Mary's Babe, is as truly God as the Eternal Father. He is a revelation of Divinity, God made manifest in the flesh, in order that all who look upon Him may begin to understand God's beauty and goodness and sanctity. This Holy One is God's Son by right; and He has come to make it possible for us sinners to become sons of God by adoption, so that in some true way we may resemble Him, and acquire those qualities which belong to God alone.

Recall for a moment what the Church teaches—that Christ's grace restores us, although with certain restrictions, to that original state of holiness which belonged to man before the Fall.

Included in that original endowment had been the gift of divine sonship.

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Man had been adopted as one of God's own kindred; he had been united to God by wonderful bonds of sympathy and understanding and love; he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit and had been allowed to share in qualities which were divine. To man thus constituted in a life of happiness and holiness, temptation presented itself; and he, selfishly seeking his own apparent advantage, deliberately forsook the life of love. In so doing, he lost God; he fell from the position to which he had been elevated.

Shorn of grace, man sank to the lower level of earth, henceforth excluded from the privileged intimacy that had once been his, unable even to commune with God. Shut out from Paradise, capable only of blind, ineffectual gropings after the beauty and the truth and the goodness possessed in happier days, he was doomed to endless misery, had not God come to save him. As we know, God did come. Jesus was born here upon earth that

man might receive again the adoption of sonship, might again be admitted to divine life and friendship. The human soul is thus again enabled to converse intimately with its Maker, knowing and loving Him and in turn being loved by Him in a fashion and degree natural not even to the angels.

Such is the Catholic doctrine concerning the fall of man and his subsequent restoration. It is a brief statement of the most critical period in the history of the human race. It is something more personal than this, as well; for it suggests to our individual memories great critical moments in our own past experience.

That which happened to mankind has happened also to us individually. We, too, are looking back through shadowy years to a distant day of innocence and holiness, when all was well with us and we lived very near to God. We, too, remember days passed in the light and glory of the Divine Presence, when prayer was easy and obedience

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willing and temptation not hard to overcome.

Far distant days, indeed, they seem to us now. We look back to them as some patriarch may have looked back to the Golden Age of Paradise, as a banished man looks back to his home country and his childhood, with inexpressible yearning to turn back the flight of time. If only once again, as in happier years, I might look up into the face of God, reverent, yet unafraid! If ten or twenty or fifty years of life could be blotted out, and I could again be the child I was that day of long ago, before I ever stumbled into evil paths and turned my back upon God who made me!

Is it a wild hope, an impossible dream? Does the past remain utterly irrevocable? Can sin never be undone? Or is there still a chance that some mighty intervention of the Omnipotent Hand of God may even now roll away the years, efface the consequences of our criminal disobedience,

and restore to us again the holiness and the joy that were ours in that ancient day when, yet unstained by sin, we really were the children of God? Is it possible to be born again?

Jesus Christ, in the crib at Bethlehem, is our answer. He, the Infinite God, begotten of the Father before all ages, has come to be born again in time, in order that the whole race of man may be reborn, in order that you and I and every wicked sinner may become what He is here—a little child.

This answer staggers the mind. It would seem too hard to believe, did we not see Him here. Even after looking upon Him, we should imagine we had mistaken the significance of His coming, were it not that the Holy Spirit tells us plainly what it means: "God sent His Son . . . that we might become adopted sons."

We may take heart, then, those of us who sigh for the return of a day long past and for the restoration of our vanished virtue. It is precisely for the

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accomplishment of such a miracle that Jesus Christ has come. We have but to sink down on penitent knees before our Brother who is born for us and ask the grace to be born again for Him. Just as surely as we ask with sincerity, the request will be granted to us.

We shall be made children again.

What then? Of course, we shall be children who resemble our Brother. Of course, we shall abide with Him, look constantly upon Him, heed His every word, copy in our feeble way His every deed. Living thus in His likeness, we shall always remain children in the wonderful sense in which He Himself never ceases to remain a Child.

Years that force the body to mature and to decay and die, will work no alteration of our spirit; in time and eternity we shall be like this Child, our elder Brother, the First Born of all His many brethren. Years that fail to rob us of our innocence will be equally unable to deprive us of our joy. The

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simple delight that fills the unspoiled heart of the child, the peace that is the characteristic spirit of Christmas, and in some little measure is shared by the poorest and the worst at such a season, this will become our permanent possession when once we have put on the spirit of the Christ of Bethlehem.

Each day we open a new chapter of our lives. Many a secret the future withholds from us, many a surprise it keeps in store. Still we can forecast much. Clearly enough we see, even now, burdens we shall have to endure, temptations we must encounter, a summons we shall surely receive to unselfish sacrifice and heroic endeavor. Even now we know, as well as we shall ever know, upon what the issue will depend; we know what we must do to be both happy and holy; as, on the other hand, we know well the course of conduct that brings ruin.

“Glory to God!” This is the first and foremost aim of Jesus Christ. “At the beginning of the book it is written

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of Me, behold I come to do Thy will, O God." Thus did our Lord Himself express His sense of the primary motive of His coming.

So, too, at the beginning of the book of every good life, and at the head of every chapter, must be written down, "Glory to God!" So, too, before starting out upon any undertaking, we must remind ourselves that God's glory, not our own selfish interest, is to be the guiding principle and the dominant motive of all our activity.

"Glory to God!" It rings out in the refrain of the angelic choirs passing and repassing over the head of the new-born Babe as He lies in His manger at Bethlehem. It keeps echoing in our ears after we have gone away out into the world again. And it must resound within our souls over and over, always and ever, in the crises of great temptation, in sore moments of disappointment, under the stress of tormenting pain. So shall our weakness be stayed up, in the hour of need, by the familiar

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music of those heavenly words—
“GLORY TO GOD!”

“And Peace to Men.” It was by bringing peace upon earth that Christ gave glory to God. In the same way shall we fulfill our divinely appointed destiny. May that destiny be enthusiastically realized. May our coming and our going, our speaking and our doing, ever further the growth of that peace which is the condition of human happiness. May we renounce our pleasures, surrender our plans, and sacrifice our hopes, readily and gladly, whenever by so doing we shall add to the sum of human joy, and bring peace upon earth to men of good-will.

“Glory to God and Peace to Men:” our motto for life. Because it is the motto of our Brother, and it is to be worn by every adopted son of God.

CHAPTER VI

The Measure of Love

TO Love—even more than to Liberty—may we say, “What crimes are committed in thy name!”

Yet, though base passions daily masquerade as love, though its sacred name is taken in vain, blasphemed, worn as a cloak for sin, it still retains its power to charm. Not even the hate of hate stirs men so effectually as the love of love.

Contrasted with all other manifestations of love, the life of Jesus Christ is unique, supreme, resembling no other thing except the answering love it has itself inspired in the hearts of men.

Two great truths are clear to those who have looked on Christ—that in love He was more than man, and that, imitating Him, we can be more than

human. Love was the measure of His greatness; it must be ours.

Saints seem to have learned the nature of Christ's love best by the study of His Passion. Indeed, no soul that has meditated on that supreme tragedy can ever totally forget it. One who has contemplated Christ dying is apt to go about as a man who has heard his own death sentence spoken.

Jesus, the kindest, the best, the strongest and the tenderest of friends, our support in toil, our comrade in temptation and suffering, has bowed His head in death upon the cross after hours of indescribable anguish. Thinking of this, we remember also the bottomless depths of depression into which His soul was swept during the frightful agony in the Garden, when the dread forebodings of the future wrung blood from every pore in His quivering body. Even now, centuries after the event, those vivid scenes come before us and are branded on our imaginations painfully, indelibly.

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Yet, for all its horror, the Passion is the seal and stamp of a heavenly consolation. His agony forestalled, prevented ours. By His stripes have we been healed. We do not contemplate the dying figure on the Cross, without being reminded of our own redemption through the Precious Blood then poured forth in such abundance. The atonement wrought by Christ has, we remember, saved us from inevitable and eternal misery, has brought us our divine opportunity, our one chance of heaven. Ill should we have fared had not He suffered, for, even now, rescued from the abyss and set upon the road to Paradise, we find the achievement of our salvation still a task of enormous difficulty.

Behind our sense of suffering, then, lies a sense of gratitude. We shrink at the thought of Christ's Passion; and yet we are thankful that He went through those dark and bloody ways, treading His lonely path of anguish that the multitude of men might be

spared the final anguish of separation from God. In those moments He was bearing on His own shoulders the burden He knew would be too heavy for our strength, and amid the all but unrelieved blackness of Passontide grief, shines this one golden ray.

We look back at the horror of what then was done, but also we look forward to the great things which it is now possible for us to do—for the crime of Christ's murderers may be in some sense expiated by our repentance. The sorrows which once encompassed Him are to be swallowed up in His greater joy, when the salvation of His sinful brethren is assured. This thought comes like a new inspiration, an impelling conviction. We must go forward where He has led; we must follow Him, and if necessary die with Him. By showing for us a love such as no other hath ever shown, He summons and persuades us to love Him in like manner.

Christ Himself appealed to His Pas-

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sion as a test of His love for man. Weighed thus, His love stands out as the unique love of human history. Never before had men been loved, never again could men be loved, as deeply as Christ Jesus loved them. For love is tested in the crucible of suffering; and no human heart ever passed through so fiery a torment as that to which our Saviour was subjected. The love which survived that test ranks first, forever.

We are well aware of the common course of human love. It thrives upon joy; it is eager for pleasure and satisfaction; it is chilled and numbed by disappointment; it crumbles under the repeated blows of pain. Naturally, men begin to love what pleases; naturally, too, they love no longer, when love becomes a source of suffering. A month, a year, a stretch of years, one's love may last, when conditions are all favorable. But repelled, scorned, lashed with the whips of ingratitude,

selfishness and pain, human love does not endure.

Jesus Christ, however, loved with a love more intense than the pain by which He was tortured. He loved us while He foresaw the coming of this pain; He loved us amid the worst throes of His Passion; and His love outlasted the blasphemous rejoicings of His triumphant executioners. Bethlehem finds upon Calvary the perfect fulfillment of its promise of love. The uttermost word possible to God or to man, in the way of love, is spoken in Gethsemani, along the Via Dolorosa, from off the Cross of Golgotha.

The records of Christian sanctity show how wonderful a response the Passion has evoked from human hearts down through the centuries, in every corner of the earth, and in every walk of life. In always widening circles, centred around that rough and blood-stained tree converted into a throne, the purest and the strongest among our race's children have gathered by un-

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numbered thousands, each new generation sending a new host of lovers thrilled, captivated by the spell of the Cross.

What was not possible to mere nature has actually been realized through the marvelous power of redeeming grace. Weak flesh and blood have given birth to men and women heroic enough to open up new worlds of possibility for the human soul. There is nothing conceivable which the lovers of the Cross of Christ have not been able to achieve. The promises of this world of low desire, the threats uttered by bodily and spiritual foes, the apparent darkening of God's countenance, all these have been made light of, unselfishly braved, by hearts grown superhuman through the consciousness of Christian love. That story of love is the fairest chapter in all human history. And, but for the Passion, it would never have been written at all.

Passiontide brings all this home to us with the force of a direct appeal. It is

with deep purpose that the Church persuades us yearly to gather together and to meditate upon the story of our Saviour's agony. She would have us become so impenetrated with the sense of His great love for us and of our possibility of great love for Him, that into our lives there may come a change transforming us, even us, into holy men and women, capable of loving God with the heroic love of saints.

Some change, some improvement, all of us surely need. Our best has never yet been realized. Each year there is the new chance that the perfect chapter of our lives may now begin. From sin to repentance, perhaps; from indifference to affection; from lukewarm service to the enthusiasm of devotedness; from commonplace selfishness to holy love—these are the alterations that may be wrought in us according to our needs and our generous purpose.

Few will hesitate to admit that up to this moment their lives have not been sufficiently fruitful; few will be con-

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tent to go before the judgment seat with no more to their credit than what they have earned thus far; few are unaware of evil habits, more or less serious, not yet wholly eradicated; few feel free of unsatisfied aspirations and disappointed spiritual ambitions.

By one and all, of whatever moral stature, let the same great truth be pondered, that love is the beginning of religion and its end. Divine love expressed itself in the Passion of Christ with a fullness above the power of the human mind to measure; and the memory of the Redeeming Blood poured forth during that Passion has made men and women supernatural in the strength of their love of God. There is no sinner in all the wide world who may not by the grace of that same Precious Blood, if he so wills, be converted into a saint.

What are the common obstacles to improvement? Are they not, generally speaking, pleasant things we will not renounce, or unpleasant things we re-

fuse to do? Be we beginners, or far advanced on the road to holiness, it is ever the same. The issue lies always between distasteful duty and pleasant sin, between God and self, between love and indulgence.

Perhaps the stirring spell of the Passion of Christ, its ability to sway and move and its magic power to make weak men into heroes, is due to the fact that when we look upon the face of the dying Christ and number His wounds and watch His dripping Blood, we necessarily lose something of our fear of pain, something of our devotion to personal comfort and sensuous delight. That is the reason why the great spiritual teacher of the world, Holy Church, prudent mother and wise guide, never lets the eyes of her children wander far away from the vision of the Cross. That is the reason why—in so far as human reason is capable of discerning the reason why—the story of the great masters of divine

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love is always the story of a man or a woman contemplating a crucifix.

The Cross of Jesus Christ tells us of the possibilities within ourselves. Look on the Man of Sorrows and say what it is He bids us do. Is it not, in one word, to love Him despite every obstacle and every discouragement? It is as if dying upon the Cross, He had called out to us for aid; and go to Him we must through fire and flood; go to Him we will, though it cost comfort and riches and friends and health and life itself. For He has spilled out His last drop of Blood for our salvation, and we should deserve the lowest hell were we callous to the appeal of His dying lips. One who has suffered thus for us shall not call on us in vain.

That is the message of Passiontide. The bleeding figure that hangs upon Calvary's Cross is the Friend and Saviour of our souls. He has laid down His life for love of us; He has laid down His life to show us how to love Him in return.

CHAPTER VII

Today or Tomorrow?

CARPE DIEM! Seize the day as it flies! Eat, drink and be merry. Meet not the tragic fate of the man who saves up for a future he is never to behold!"

It is the world's philosophy, based on human instinct not controlled.

See it betrayed by the child with his shining toy, unconscious for the moment of any interest but his play. See it in the young man aglow with the rapture of his first success. See it in the radiant girl, treading the rose-strewn paths of maiden love. See it in every man with his riches and his friendship and his kindred. All alike are content with the present and careless of the future; they think they already grasp the elements of perfect joy; they forget the unseen, the unattained.

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But if we thus neglect the ideal, and dwell instead upon the fullness and richness of our present possessions; if the spirit grows blind in proportion as we become familiar with the glory and the treasures of the physical world; if we liken ourselves to the plants which grow and the beasts which breed, without restraint for the present or concern for the future—then, indeed, we have sore need of some divine influence which shall lift us up out of the mire of this spiritual desolation and set us upon a height whence we may behold again the littleness of earth and the measureless expanse of heaven.

Humanly speaking, it is only when the hair is white, when age has come and life is almost over, that men begin to realize how hopelessly elusive is the happiness promised by wealth and fame and love and power; how vain are the pursuits in which youth and freshness have been wasted; how truly the real value of life lies in its opportunities for the accomplishment of in-

visible, ideal, eternally enduring results.

It is to forestall the bitter experiences of a wasted life and to induce men in good time to direct their efforts toward the proper end, that Christ became our teacher.

Of all lessons, is it not the inadequacy of the present that we find it hardest to learn? What is the matter with us, but that we are petty, and short-sighted, and small-minded; that we fail to view things with eternal eyes? If we are ever to realize our great destiny, then we must learn to appreciate the insignificance of the present, except as the symbol and vehicle of the future; we must know that the supreme end of our endeavor is in this life unattainable.

Think of those old tormenting questions:

Why did Christ appear to another generation and not to ours? Why did He burst the shackles of death and rise from the tomb, if He was not to bless

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the earth forever with His presence? Indeed, why should He ever have assumed a body of flesh at all, unless in obedience to an irresistible desire to live with men; unless He wished always to be uplifting humanity by the inspiration of His word and His example?

We ask, "Why?" But the answer is clear.

Christ came in human form chiefly for the purpose of awakening man to a sense of divine possibilities. He rose visibly from the dead in order to bear witness to the truth of His message. He vanished into the unseen world again to emphasize the fact that the battle is still unwon and human perfection still unattained, to show that only in the life beyond do we arrive at the real goal of our existence.

Belief in Christ implies a facing toward the future, a confession of the inadequacy of the present. Only in another state of existence and at a distant time, shall the reward of the dis-

ciple be given, and the wage of the laborer be paid; there and then only shall the weary be at rest, and the soldier free to lay down his arms. The immediate purpose of Christ's earthly existence was fulfilled when once He had flashed the vision of a perfect life before humanity's wondering eyes. Forever after, His figure and His story would be sure to break in upon the dreams of a slumbering world and trouble its self-contentment. The risen Christ could never be wholly forgotten. So long as that lesson haunted human memory, the present, the visible, the merely natural, could never suffice to quench the thirst in the soul of man.

Christ, then, willed to bestow upon us a new conception of life, to erect a new scale of values. He gave to men's eyes a fresh perception of spiritual beauty; He stirred men's souls with a new discontent; He made it forever impossible that His disciples should be satisfied with the things produced by

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earth. Into their hearts He flung the dart of a divine ambition; before their sight He flashed the image of Godlike possibilities. To the meanest of human creatures was granted the opportunity of one day sharing in the life of God.

Man was spurred on by the promise; his way was lighted by the heavenly vision; and on it all, Christ's Resurrection set the seal of infallible security. Like the desire of the moth for the star, of the day for the morrow, that hope burns quenchlessly in human breasts, as men and women toil slowly up the heights of more than human sanctity. If they faint not it is because they know that Christ, risen from the dead, is going before.

Sometimes doubt afflicts a man. Then the vision of the risen Christ appears. It is as if a whisper from heaven had been uttered and the voice of God had commanded us to put away hesitation, to cast out fear, to trust in the goodness of the Father,

who sent us Christ and who promises to give Him to us again forever.

Sometimes a man is tempted. Then the risen Christ speaks to us of victory through renunciation and of salvation through the Cross. The deceits of sin are exposed in all their miserable trickery; the curtain is raised for our eyes to behold the joys of heaven; and Jesus is seen again, as Stephen saw Him, at the right hand of the Father, looking down with smiling lips and loving gesture, inviting us to follow. What assurance does it not give a man when, in the stress of conflict, he thus feels Christ urging and God aiding him! What strength comes then to the arm, what hope to the heart!

Sometimes we are stricken with sorrow. It may be that an unforeseen calamity has fallen upon us and that life is blighted. We are reduced from comfort to poverty. Bodily ills, or mental torment, make existence almost insupportable. Or the cruel hand of death has torn a dear one from us, with

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possibly the added anguish that we were far away and only strangers' eyes could watch and only alien hands could serve the one we loved so tenderly. If so, how much it means to us to see beyond the clouds a fairer life unmarred by sin or sorrow, to believe that our Saviour's smile is gladdening the heart we were so helpless to console, to know that the day will come when to us also He will open the gate of the everlasting Paradise.

And sometimes a man is hungry and thirsty for the things of the soul; he is afire with the ambition of righteousness; his heart is set on holiness. When sin sickens us and sanctity attracts, how precious is the ideal embodied in the scene of Easter morn, Christ rising from the grave, His message of pardon and hope now justified eternally, His promise vindicated forevermore!

Thus, then, has the risen Christ shaped and perfected human life, assuaging our griefs, overcoming our

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difficulties, deepening our sense of sin, strengthening our longings for holiness; for to every one who follows Him, He promises a good infinitely above all that the mind of itself could conceive or the heart desire.

And the Resurrection has affected not only the individual, but the world. At this distance of time, it is hard for us to realize how greatly the social order was changed by the leaven of that inspiration. Yet even a superficial acquaintance with the best men and the noblest institutions of paganism lets us see that the pre-Christian age was the day of the omnipotent present. Men lived for visible goods. Bread and the public games, war and the power it brought—these were the things looming largest in the general consciousness. In politics, in art, in ethics, in religion, the existing generation and the visible horizon bounded man's best and highest interests. The welfare of the State was an ultimate end; and by relation to it was every right justified and every

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duty prescribed. Plato and Aristotle, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius —these were indeed noble; but we find vital defects in their conduct and fatal inconsistency in their principles.

Looking back, we may be disposed to see things glorified through the mist of centuries, and tinged with the glamor of bygone days. There is old Rome at the head of the world with her ideal of universal military conquest practically realized; and we cannot but feel a sense of enthusiasm and exaltation as we note the flashing eagles and catch the glint of sun-tipped lances, as we hear the tramp of legionaries and measure the majestic sweep of Roman law. But we forget the wailing of the abandoned infant; the shame of the unblushing woman; the unspeakable degradation of the slave.

There is Greece for the eye to rest upon, a star in the night, a pinnacle rising out of the silent ocean of antiquity, the fair home of philosophy and the temple of art. But her sages treat

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of the breeding of men as of so many cattle, and discuss forms of æsthetic expression which must remain forever nameless in an age of Christian enlightenment.

One need not attempt to show that in the matter of personal virtue an individual Christian is always the superior of a pagan; but let the two systems be set in contrast. In the Roman amphitheater they confront each other —here on the benches the intoxicated crowd, delirious, absorbed, fascinated with the present, shouting their savage joy, and with down-turned thumbs demanding the blood of victims; there on the crimson sands, the little group of martyrs serenely facing the future.

Into this dark age of the ascendant present steals Christianity like the glow of dawn. Around time is thrown the luminous halo of eternity. Out of the human soul are evoked unsuspected possibilities. Slowly, as figures which take shape in the soft, gray morning, new principles and institutions begin

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to outline themselves. Sublime teachings strike root and blossom in the hearts of men. For the first time the absolute sanctity of human life is impressed on the public consciousness. A strange new doctrine about the dignity of labor and the glory of serving is revealed. Hereafter, in the sight of God, there can be no distinction of persons. A mystic word is spoken and forth from the darkness starts a gracious vision of beauty, the Christian woman, to hover above the race in its progress onward, to be the symbol of all things lovely and sacred, to set the halo of chastity on the brow of the mother of men.

Then begins that long procession of saints, the like of which history never knew before—Paul, and Sebastian, the soldier, and Augustine, philosopher and penitent, and Agnes and Cecilia and Catherine and Teresa and Joan, and Francis and Philip and Vincent and Damien. All the old nobility of nature remains; and added to it, grac-

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ing it, come new qualities, strange, striking, and divine—the fruit of that seed which the Gospel had sown in the world.

A new influence is at work; man's sleep is disturbed; the luminous figure of the risen Christ is haunting his dreams. Caught in the spell of an ideal not of earth, life is wonderfully transformed; for as surely as the daylight comes from this sun shining over our heads, so surely have the blessings of our civilization come from belief in the risen Christ and from response to Christian inspiration.

So, if the soul be greater than the body and truth fairer than a lie; if it is nobler to die a martyr than to live a traitor and a coward; if to love faithfully is better than to lust; if to render justice to the meanest serf is manlier than to slay a helpless enemy—then it is Christ we must thank for those ideals which are highest, and for those achievements which are worthiest to be recorded.

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Easter reminds us of this; tells us, in a way, why it was expedient that Christ should go; shows us what the sending of His Spirit has done for the individual and for the world. It bids us remember that we have not here a lasting city, but are pilgrims making our journey slowly and with difficulty toward a country which is afar. Thither has Christ gone before us; there He has prepared a place for us; there He Himself awaits us—He, Christ, the Lord, who was slain but is alive; who was buried, but is arisen. Alleluia!

CHAPTER VIII

Is There Any Real Evil?

ABOUT to ascend into heaven, our Lord speaks to the Disciples, to prepare them for His going.

A new epoch is now to begin. Men and women hitherto supported by the visible presence of the Saviour are henceforth to walk alone—looking forward indeed to the day that will reunite Disciple and Master, but meanwhile journeying through the darkness of lifelong separation. It is a moment inexpressibly solemn, a moment full of sadness.

Our Lord's words are little calculated to lessen the apprehension of the Disciples. What He says is far from reassuring to flesh and blood.

He foretells a time of persecution and suffering. The Disciples are to

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experience a great testing of Faith—they will be expelled from the synagogue; they will be hunted down like wild beasts; they will be destroyed as enemies of God. Insult, banishment, suffering, death—such is His bequest to them. Enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father, He will look down and see His followers writhing in the flames and on the rack; He will hear them invoke His Name as they are tortured and done to death. And He will not intervene.

Nothing could be clearer, then, than Christ's intention to promise His Disciples no freedom from suffering, no protection against bodily pain. He gives them no assurance of temporal reward. Calmly, as if outlining His own plan, He promises them—persecution. This, then, is something which fits perfectly into His design. And when it comes, there will be no excuse for panic or apprehension.

What was it He had said?

“Remember that I told you.”

It will be necessary only to recall His word, and to be faithful to the ever-present grace of the Spirit. On this one condition all will come to a happy ending; and the heavier burden of suffering will be but the measure of the greater final joy.

How quickly and how accurately our Saviour's prediction was verified. Turn over the pages of the Acts of the Apostles. Hardly had the Holy Spirit come when the era of persecution dawned. Generation after generation witnessed the attempt to drown the Christian faith in the blood of martyrs. Rack and scourge, sword and fire, burning at the stake and crucifixion, every means that diabolical ingenuity could devise was used against Christ's followers. Yet all in vain! Strong in the strength of the Spirit sent by their Master, weak men, frail women, little children, were able to defy the fury of the world and the malice of the powers of darkness. Not delivered from suffering, they were able to overcome it.

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Pain, ceasing to be the ruler of the human soul, became a guide to new and splendid heights of glory. For this is the victory achieved by the Divine Spirit coming down into the dark places of the world, and visiting the timid and the weak. He illuminates them with heavenly light and lifts them forever beyond the influence of cowardly fear. The saint dreads nothing; for nothing can conquer his soul.

To us also the Paraclete was promised, and in our lives, too, the prediction made by Jesus has been verified. The advent of the Spirit has been followed by times of trial and often by great suffering. Is it not consoling to be assured that such affliction is not a sign of God's displeasure, nor an indication that our Saviour has abandoned us, but rather a necessary condition of progress toward the state of holiness which is our destiny?

After all, the lesson we most need to learn is that which teaches us how to bear trials and endure suffering. In-

evitably nature will protest against what is unpleasant, nature will argue, nature will rebel. How many good people, even apparently spiritual people, complain when trial comes, almost as if they thought our Lord had promised that no disciple of His should ever have to bear a cross! How many times temporal prosperity is expected, even demanded, as if it were the fixed reward of a virtuous life! How often, alas, do we not find people alienated from religion because church-going or the keeping of the Commandments has not protected them from material misfortune!

But after the warning given by Christ's own lips, who can reasonably persist in so gross a distortion of our Lord's teaching? Has He not told us beforehand to anticipate trials, injustice, pain, even death? Did He not bid us remember His Word, when these things should come to pass—and remembering it, be comforted by the knowledge that His Spirit is with us?

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Yet this is precisely what we most commonly forget—the consoling truth that despite all hardships, and amid every hardship, the heart of the faithful disciple is the abode of the Spirit of God. If we could but remember that fact constantly, then, like the martyrs of old, we should be invulnerable of soul. Nothing could hurt us; nothing could defeat us; out of every loss and every pain we should draw occasion of new sanctity to ourselves.

It is curious that people who are familiar with the Gospel all their lives should so often forget that Christ bade His Disciples take up their cross and follow Him; it is curious that Christians should so frequently cry out in protest at a little loss, or a little pain—as if Christ had represented His Kingdom to be an earthly, sensual Paradise! There may be men who ignore or despise the cross; but surely this is not because Christ ignored or despised it. There may be some who refuse to practise patience in adversity;

but surely this is not due to any lack of example on the part of the Christian saints.

The value of suffering, the worth of patience, are fundamental in the teaching of Christ. Who that pays heed to Him can be unaware of that?

Another strange phenomenon is that of the Catholic Christian hearkening eagerly to a novel sect which professes to teach men how to triumph over all evil and all pain. As if Christ had not already taught that wisdom! As if that teaching had not already produced the greatest heroes and heroines of history!

It is an old rule with the saints and their disciples, that all things work together for good to those who love God. It is a triumph often set down in the records of the Church, that ordinary men and women have been so successfully trained to fear nothing, that they can never be robbed of joy. The teaching of Christ, as interpreted by the Church, as exemplified by the saints, has become the source of the most mar-

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velous triumph of mind over matter. And the explanation of this perpetual miracle is to be found in the presence of the indwelling Spirit, the Paraclete, whom Christ sent, the Spirit who leads the disciples into all truth.

Close at hand, then, in the Gospel which is our own, in the religion which has been taught to us from the days of childhood, may be found the secret of that power which we seek in vain elsewhere. Let us not be deluded by new phrases, nor by promises wildly extravagant. Rather let us attempt to absorb a greater share of that Christian sanctity which has brought forth such splendid fruit century after century, which eliminates evil by teaching us to cooperate with the grace of God, and which recognizes physical pain to be not a mere phantasm, but the very useful servant of the soul.

We hear a good deal nowadays also, about the power of healthy thought to bring peace to the mind and strength to the body. Very often the professed

advocates of right thinking are guilty of extreme exaggeration. It is not true nor reasonable to affirm that our thinking will control the whole current of events; it is not sane to hold that a right system of thought will avail to prevent all accident and all disease.

The world in which we live is not the mere creation of our mind, but is the theater of events and the field of forces quite outside us and beyond our power to alter. On the other hand, it is true that the most important element in our world is the subjective element, and that no catastrophe can ever destroy the peace of the soul which lives within itself serene. We cannot say there are no misfortunes, no unhappy accidents, no undesirable and regrettable events; but we can with truth affirm that all such things may be turned to good use by the power of divine grace and the unyielding determination of the will to be loyal to God.

This is the true doctrine which our

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Saviour taught, and which the lives of Christian saints have fully and frequently demonstrated. Those who have adjusted their lives to this teaching will not be misled, nor even greatly tempted, by the extravagant promises of an untried religion which makes statements about the world and life totally at variance with reason and with common sense.

To us, then, as to the Disciples on the eve of our Lord's departure, there comes the assurance, not that we shall have uninterrupted comfort, but that we shall have the assistance of the Holy Spirit to carry us through such trials as may be ours. Christ prepares us for persecution; and at the same time promises to make us strong enough to endure and overcome.

Just as in the history of God's saints we perceive the realization of the divine promise of ultimate victory, so, too, we may be certain that in our own lives evil will never triumph, while we cling to the hand of God and follow

the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For He is indeed the Paraclete, "The Comforter," in this high and holy sense. And when He has come to the soul and dwells therein, no enemy can vanquish, no evil really hurt us; but all things, big and little, pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad, will work together for our lasting and perfect joy.

CHAPTER IX

Master or Servant?

TO GIVE to God the things which are God's is surely a reasonable rule. It is a just, moderate, balanced statement of man's duties. It sets things in due proportion. It carries conviction as a truth self-evident. God demands of us only that which belongs to Him; the rest we may dispose of as we will. He exacts His due, nothing more. But His due He does exact; and with nothing less than His due, will He be satisfied.

What then is God's due? To what can He lay claim as His by right? How much should a man give to God, that He may be cheated of nothing belonging to Him?

Why, surely faith tells us plainly that everything belongs to God. Man has nothing of his own, nothing that does

not come to him as a gift, a loan, a talent held in trust, to be accounted for again. To satisfy the demands of justice therefore, a man must spend no moment of time, use no faculty of body or of mind, dispose of no created thing, animate or inanimate, in any way opposed to the interest and the will of his Creator. Even the things that are given to Cæsar in accord with the prescriptions of man-made law, must be given in a fashion that will merit God's approval.

All this is clear. Nothing less would make a reasonable rule. When we give to God all that we are, all that we have, and all that we control, or lay claim to; when we dispose of everything in accord with His will; then, and then alone, do we lead well-ordered lives, then and then alone, may we properly be called reasonable beings.

Yet it is hard to be wholly reasonable. We who exist on the surface of things, and deal so largely with appearances, find it a difficult matter to live

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according to a perfect rule. The whole universe at times seems to have entered into a conspiracy to prevent us from being faithful, to blind us to the fact of God's absolute dominion.

I feel as if I were lord and master over many things, and friends urge me to believe that I am. Creatures look as if they belonged to me; they put themselves into my hands and proclaim themselves ready to do my bidding. The laws of nature wait upon me, as if expecting my command—earth, air, water, fire, assume the forms and discharge the functions that I prescribe. Space is mine, the space of all the globe, to roam up and down and round about, whithersoever I will. Time is mine, to act or to rest, as I choose, to do this or that, as I elect—all the time that is contained in a year or a long series of years, is mine to spend according to my choice. Power is mine, power over other men who are influenced and guided by me, who imitate or obey me, who act in one way or

in another, just as I decide. So that at times I feel myself to be a master, an independent ruler.

Yet faith bids me believe I am but a steward, no more than a servant; and that all I have, or control, belongs to my Master, God, must be used for Him, given to Him. All the time, the power, the possessions, the friends, the servants of my will—all must be offered to God as in very truth His own.

To this stern test, then, we are each submitted. We are bidden to resign our claim of kingship, to abdicate our quasi dominion over men and things, to admit in word and deed that God owns all and that we own nothing. As we go further on in life and in experience, we are ever learning new ways in which the rights of God come in to displace our rights; we are summoned more and more to surrender what we never thought we should have to surrender. Finally it seems as if the very measure of our spiritual growth

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were to be found in the number and variety of sacrifices that we are forced to make under pain of disloyal resistance to the clear command of God.

How hard this is to nature, only the tried soul knows; for though we may have foreseen that absolute self-surrender would be difficult, we never fully measure the cost until our soul stands at the crossroads and listens to the summons. Every saint's approach to holiness is along a pathway of renunciation. Before the sweetness of divine love is fully attained, the bitterness of parting must be renewed over and over again, and the road be strewn with holocausts.

Since it is faith which makes plain the supremacy of God, the man without faith is of course blind in this respect. The ready victim of that conspiracy which leads men to be content with the appearances of things, an unbeliever is apt to be deluded into assuming a real mastership. In his own behalf, and in behalf of his friends, he

undertakes to exploit the world and its contents. Human self-interest is the motive and the only standard of his conduct.

Soon there disappears from his life every trace of that Christian idealism which is the consequence of Christian faith. Without thought of a supernatural motive, without concern for a heavenly interest, he is swiftly converted into merely a shrewder type of animal. Inevitable logic drives him to make use of himself and other things, according to his own likes and dislikes, independently of all law, and to conduct life without any relation to a higher existence.

The selfishness which is the antithesis of the Christian spirit quickly dominates such a life. Aided by the superior intelligence which is proper to man, the animal-like existence becomes more and more completely controlled by selfish desires. Self-love goes even further than nature in her wisdom is ready to sanction. Man

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gets to be infra-bestial in the cunning of his egotism, in his eager search for pleasure. He seeks to defraud not God alone, in whom he has no belief, but also humanity, toward whom he recognizes no valid obligation.

Upon such a man nature, outraged, takes quick revenge. He is foredoomed to emptiness and sterility; he is hopelessly and openly a failure. The soul that, in disregard of its birth-right of divine privileges, has refused the tribute of service to God, has at the same time rejected the one career wherein lay happiness and the sure promise of glory. Seeking only his own advantage, the individual sinks first below the grade of man; and then at last is permanently degraded quite below the level of the beast. Having refused to give to God what is rightly His, he is punished by losing even those things which he originally possessed.

This story is repeated often enough in the life of families and of nations as

well as of individuals. It is a striking visible proof that man has been given a supernatural destiny and, for good or for bad, is unable to be merely a man. He must be more, or he will become less. What satiates his animal nature corrodes his soul. The horizon of earth is not his boundary, but a gateway to his heaven. The very wealth and abundance of his gifts must serve him mainly as a large opportunity for the display of self-denial.

In a word, human life cannot find its true meaning, or its lasting value, in an existence according to the animal law, nor within the limits of the visible universe. Only the life relinquished here will be regained hereafter. The man who by faith accepts the universal dominion of God is the man who will reign over kingdoms in eternity.

But it is not only the unbeliever who ignores God's rights. Many who recognize the existence of their Maker and understand the supremacy of His claims, yet inconsistently refuse to give

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Him what is clearly His. Every sinner is guilty of this unreasonable kind of conduct. Worldly men who with their lips acknowledge God's supremacy, nevertheless in their daily lives, in the policies which they adopt, in their standards of personal behavior and in their professed social principles, practically eliminate from consideration the fact of the divine ownership of all things.

The world is filled with examples of men who act as if they themselves were supreme, as if they had absolute control of their possessions; men who have forgotten that they profess themselves to be disciples of a religion which calls them stewards, not masters, and limits their freedom sharply, both by the rights of God and by the interests of their fellow-men.

There are few crimes which may with such good right be called characteristic of our own day as those which arise from a practical disregard of the supreme rights of God in the field of

material possessions. Christian teaching gives us to understand that the earth and its fullness is a divine gift to men, to be distributed and enjoyed in the way most consistent with the good of the race, that is to say, in the way that harmonizes with the will of God.

Yet this fundamental principle is totally forgotten by a large proportion of those who possess great abundance of the divine gifts. Instead of being subordinate to the will of God and the common interest, private property is often diverted to such monstrous and immoral ends that a wave of reaction carries some sincere men as far as the denial that private property ever can be legitimate.

Certainly private property would *not* be legitimate, if it implied the power arbitrarily to use and abuse in the manner of the grossly selfish man. But the claim to this extravagant power is based upon a totally un-Christian conception of human right. No Catholic may defend the man who uses ma-

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terial wealth without regard for the will of God and the good of his neighbor. The notion that we may waste or abuse our possessions is a notion quite incompatible with the plain principles of Catholic morality. Man is a steward, first and last; and the disposal of his Master's goods injuriously to his Master's interest is a disloyal and criminal proceeding.

In the light of this principle we understand the pronouncements of some of the early Christian Fathers who spoke so plainly about the obligation of the rich to bestow their possessions on the poor. The common sentiment was expressed in the words of St. Augustine, who said: "Let him who does not wish to share his goods with the poor understand that he is being commanded to give not that which is his own, but that which is God's." This is a notion of which the present world needs to be very forcibly reminded. The loss of the sense of stewardship is modern humanity's gangrened wound.

The same principles bear upon those disputes between employer and wage-earner which nowadays afflict society like a running sore. Without attempting to determine which side may be right in any one particular quarrel, we are safe in invoking the aid of the general principles of Catholic morality which prohibit certain things as contrary to the laws of justice.

The source of the usual difficulty lies in the criminally selfish desire of an individual, or a group, to retain what belongs to God. This desire assumes many forms. One of them, common among employers of labor, is clearly pointed out and censured in the words of a famous papal encyclical (*Rerum Novarum*):

“There is a dictate of nature more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that the remuneration must be sufficient to support the wage-earner in frugal comfort. If through necessity or fear, the workman be made to accept harder

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conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice."

Thus are we reminded that the consent of our fellow-men can never liberate us from our obligations toward God, can never make it right for us to use the things of the earth as if they were absolutely our own. Always they are held in trust, to be administered according to the will of God, who is their Lord and Master as well as ours.

In the narrower field of personal piety, as well as in the broad domain of social duty, we may note what is implied by the reasonable rule of conduct laid down in the text. The little issues of daily life afford frequent opportunities to apply the principle that we are bound to seek God's will before our own, that we are always using His property, not ours.

In those great critical moments when we are called upon to make decisions that will affect the future as long as

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we live, in those early choices which gradually determine our habitual attitude toward life and little by little form our characters, in those periods of weariness, or depression, or failure, when we are tempted to raise the question whether or not it is worth while to continue striving, in each and every situation such as these we shall be enlightened by remembering that we have no choice with regard to the things of God; we must render to Him His own, whether we will or not. What belongs to Him, must be given to Him, no matter how we feel. We are never at liberty to hesitate, or to select, until every claim of His has been satisfied.

But after all—and it is our consolation to be aware of this—God is kind, though He is a master. Nothing can exceed the affectionate care with which, for our own sakes, He holds us to the discharge of our duty. By no possible method can we gain more for ourselves than by the subordinating of

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our wishes and interests to His will. The man who refuses Him the tribute of faith or service, or devoted love, is only destroying his own soul; whereas the man who gives over his life to God is surely saving it. For there is no more certain way of winning and eternally retaining for ourselves the things we most deeply desire than by giving to God the things which are God's

CHAPTER X

Are the Meek Wise?

IT is safe to say that the daily conduct of the average man implies a low esteem of what the Gospel calls humility. This but reflects the world's abhorrence of the spirit of meekness.

On many other points a sort of compromise with the Gospel will be offered, or at least permitted, by the world; but not on this. For here the world finds itself quite unable to approve what it calls mad fanaticism. The whole fabric of civilization, the life of nations, the prosperity of communities, the safety of families, the comfort of individuals—all seem to be founded largely upon the motive of self-exaltation.

To praise humility, therefore, ap-

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pears to be nothing short of recommending suicide.

"Peculiarities in the Christian may of course be tolerated; we are all more or less eccentric," says the world, in its large, good-natured way. "Live and let live is a good rule to follow. But as for the practice of humility—to speak frankly—it is just wildly impossible. The law of nature urges self-expression and self-assertion. Energy is born of the vigorous affirmation of the ego. We cannot look to others, not even to God, for help, unless we help ourselves. And the man who deliberately esteems himself little, or sets himself low, will remain of small worth to himself and to every one else. To step forward, and upward, to be aggressive and to seize control, to rise high and to dominate as much of the universe as we can, this is the rule of progress and the law of life."

On the other hand, the Scripture teaches that lowliness is the way to glory. The Psalms of David and the

Book of Proverbs repeat over and over again, that pride is the great danger, humility the great security, of men and nations. Abraham and Moses, Gideon and Saul and David and Daniel are set forth in the pages of Holy Writ as men whose meekness of soul is proof of their good standing before the judgment-seat of the Almighty.

In the New Testament the humble-spirited centurion and the Canaanitish woman and the publican are types of the spirit that leads to the obtaining of divine favors. Simon Peter and John and Mary are set before us as examples of humility that was later glorified. And Paul, for all his indomitable will, gives us here and there an unmistakable gleam of that beautiful spirit of lowliness which fits the mighty ones of earth for heaven by first converting them into little children.

Yes, the opposition is undeniable. No less evident is the fact that the Scripture ideal alone will successfully stand the test of experiment and actu-

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ally fulfill its own promise. For the men and women who have faithfully pursued this ideal are the only men and women who have attained to real greatness. We look back over the history of mankind in search of some who have realized the promises held out by the ideal of self-assertion, but we find no evidence that those promises have ever been realized.

How many men, how many women, can we pick out from the records of the long human story as instances of the value, the enduring value, of the worldling's policy? Is there one? Is there a single spirit now entered into eternity, glad with unalloyed gladness that during life it exalted self at the expense of others, and set aside humility? This is an important question; and none of us will hesitate about the answer. Viewed from the standpoint of eternity, nothing of value has ever been gained by pursuing a policy of selfishness, for the real triumphs of human achievement are those of men and

women whose lowly spirit has defeated the most powerful forces and secured the greatest victories known to human experience.

However, although Christians agree as to the truth of the principle in question, it is safe to say, nevertheless, that few of us realize how far we habitually are from being humble. It does us good at times, therefore, to reflect upon our true condition: to appreciate that we need to cultivate the virtue of lowliness in order that our Judge may not find us to have been wholly indifferent in practice to the ideals that we profess in speech.

The truth of the matter is that we are constantly acting as if we ourselves were the most important persons and our interests the most important concerns in the universe. We have constituted ourselves, as it were, the centre of the solar system, and the value of everything and everybody is measured in terms of its direct nearness to us. This is surely that exaltation of self of

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which the Gospel speaks words of condemnation. It is a point of view which does not shock the world; rather the world assumes that it will be our custom. But it must be altered to another point of view, if we are to deal with others as in the spirit of Christ.

The viewpoint which is proper to a Christian is one which lets us see the universe in true perspective, with God as its centre, with His interest supreme, and we ourselves infinitely little and unimportant. This makes things and persons of concern to us, not in the measure that they affect our ascendancy or our comfort, but in the measure that they fit in with the good pleasure and with the honor of Almighty God.

Once we have taken this point of view, once we have put ourselves in our own proper place, so to speak, we are sure to be set upon by the world and its representatives, as if we were veritable madmen. For the conscience which accepts God as the central interest of the world will constantly have to be

defending principles and pursuing policies fatally antagonistic to those that are championed by the world.

However modified, or polished, or disguised, the philosophy of the world is always and essentially a philosophy of egoism. The universe to the worldly man is something created primarily for the advantage of himself and of those he calls his own. To the Christian, on the contrary, the universe is made for the honor and glory of God ; and creation is a Christocentric system, wherein values increase or diminish in the direct ratio of their nearness to the heart of Christ.

What has just been said will help us to understand why the first and most necessary step toward the acquisition of humility is the adopting of a viewpoint which will show us all creation in true perspective.

Humility does not consist in the exaggeration of our own defects and the minimizing of our own virtues ; it does not begin and end with the advancing

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of the interests of other persons at our own expense; it is not to be acquired by talking in depreciatory fashion of the things which naturally we hold in high esteem; rather it is based upon the true view of the great facts of existence; it involves something of a sense of the relative proportions of things human and things divine. Hence, it makes ridiculous all talk of our own importance; and it impresses us with the profound conviction that, in relation to the infinite greatness of God, we and our claims and our rights are just nothing at all.

So then the humble man is really the man who has attained to the true and eternally enduring view of his own place in the universe; and who has rid himself of all illusions about his own personal importance in the history of mankind. Of course he holds views that differ greatly from those commonly entertained by persons who keep their eyes resolutely closed to actual facts. Of course he will enunciate

propositions about the relative worth of things that will seem startling, in their absurdity, to those who have not kept watch upon humanity.

But the actual truth of the situation is that the humble man sees things as they really are. It is the man void of humility who is guilty of ridiculous exaggeration; and who, in obedience to a set of absurd conventions, persists in attributing a specious value to trifles and nonentities. Indeed, the humble man is seeing things with divine clearness of vision, and is estimating them in the unfading light of eternity.

Patience is one of the fruits of this clarity of vision which comes to the humble man. He does not suffer his soul to be tormented by the petty issues that fret and trouble the wrangling spirits, who act as if it were of eternal concern that their childish sense should be accepted as wisdom, and their wavering wills should dominate the plans of other men!

It is of so little account that we

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should be disappointed or that we should have to wait; it is so small a matter that we should be treated unfairly or should be misunderstood. There is One good and One great, God alone. There is but One who has claims upon the attention, the reverence, the obedience, of men. There is but One who has reason to visit offences with wrath and punishment. As for human creatures, their only concern should be the patient working out of their own salvation by daily, hourly devotion to the all-holy will of God.

Humility then, being the child of simplicity, is the parent of sanctity. It begets undivided attention to the one thing needful, it inspires the soul to sweep aside the petty interests of earth and to be solicitous only for the really precious concerns of heaven. What is divine and splendid is bought with the surrender of what is in reality paltry and valueless, be it ever so shining. The pearl of great price is eagerly purchased; all lesser jewels are gladly sold.

The truly humble man will be necessarily holy. It is equally safe to say that none but the saint will attain to the possession of true humility.

It is plain that the straight path to the virtue of humility is the practice of meditating upon the eternal truths, of beholding the glory of the ever-present God. The false lights of the world are shining into the eyes of many men and blinding them; the dancing flames of the marshland and the pictured mirage of the desert are beckoning them to undertake many a useless and many a dangerous pursuit. But the soul whose eyes are bent steadily upon the vision of the Crucified, who reads lessons of divine wisdom in the closing eyes of the dying Christ, will not be led astray.

What things are to God and to our Saviour, what they have been and will be to prophets and apostles and martyrs and confessors and virgins, this is what they truly are and this is what they are seen to be by the man whose sight is strengthened by constant contemplation

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of divine objects. Learning about God has taught him much about the world and much about himself; and he is content to accept God's wisdom as infinitely superior to his own calculation, and to revere God's will as infinitely preferable to his own choosing. Thus having humbled himself to the level of his own nothingness, he is exalted to the level of God's greatness; and having distrusted his own shortsighted vision, he is enabled to see with the penetrating vision of God. Living according to the dictates of divine wisdom, he will share for eternity in the divine joy.

CHAPTER XI

Can I Be Forgiven?

WE are all sinners.

Men may shut their eyes to the facts confronting them; they may twist their memories and distort their judgments; they may wilfully blind themselves, and externally deny the conviction forced upon their inmost souls; but they cannot look squarely at their own experiences and honestly repudiate the charge of sin. The unspoiled conscience is loud and clear in its accusation; disregarded and outraged, it will still be heard. Even in the last stage of moral callousness a man must grip his stifled monitor by the throat, or it will rise again as from the dead and challenge him to deny his guilt.

There are kinds and degrees of sin, to be sure; there are stages in progress

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up toward holiness, or down toward hell; but, one and all, we are properly classed as sinful men; the heart of every one of us yearns for reconciliation, for divine forgiveness. A sense of sin haunts the best and the worst alike; for we are, as our forefathers have been before us, and our children shall be after us. No one of us dare stand before the deep-seeing eye of God and claim to be pure. Some mercy, some purifying grace must become ours, ere ever our hearts can find intimate and enduring peace.

There could be no real religion, scarcely even a pretense of religion, without the recognition of this fundamental fact and some endeavor to minister to this human need. History, when it told the story of humanity's untutored gropings after truth, and related the various human ways in which the sin-stained soul sought purgation, gave assurance thereby, that in the Christian revelation there would be

ample recognition of and generous provision for the sorrowful sinner.

Christ's words and deeds alike were the more than abundant realization of this hope. With a directness that could not be ignored, with a frequency and a whole-heartedness that scandalized the Pharisees, Christ went to the sinner and transformed his ineffectual regret into a supreme, heart-breaking grief for sin which shines out in the Gospel age, and in every epoch of Christian history, as the token distinguishing the repentance of Christ's true disciples from the lip-sorrow and the half-trifling apologies of other men. He who came to minister to man's gravest needs set before us as the very first article of His evangel, the summons to repentance and the assurance of divine pardon.

As it was characteristic of Christ in His ministry, so it has been characteristic of His Church, to arouse within the sorrow-stricken sinner a most undoubting conviction of forgiveness and

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the liveliest hope for future preservation from sin. One might be startled sometimes were it not for the plain lessons of the Gospel, and the memory of Christ's own boldness—one might be startled at the methods which the Catholic Church is wont to use in dealing with the penitent.

Unmistakable in her declaration of what God's law requires, uncompromising in the fierceness with which she denounces guilt and menaces the guilty, she nevertheless, with the same divine audacity which characterized our Lord, addresses sinful men with God's voice and God's authority. She ventures not only to proclaim aloud in the world's hearing the pardon of sin, but even to soothe and cheer the heart bruised with contrition, bidding the sinner cast off the shameful memory and the paralyzing fear, encouraging him to stand side by side and serve on equal footing with the just who need not penance. In directness, finality, and measureless sweep, the Church's

call to repent and be saved compares only with Christ's summons to prepare for the coming of the kingdom.

Human at once and Christ-like, this attitude of the Church toward sin has ever been one of the strongest arguments for her divinity. It takes the experience of ages and the wisdom born of world-wide practice, it requires the tender patience of a mother and the divine love of an Infinite God, thus to mingle with the off-scourings of the race, to choose as a mission the treatment of all human sin, and to succeed in this ministry.

To see the Church in the fulfillment of her mission, to note her ability, her constancy, her long-suffering, her unselfishness, her success, is to have encountered an almost irresistible appeal to accept her as divine.

Where but from her teaching shall we learn skill in dealing with temptation and in curing fault? Where better than in her conduct, shall we find a living example of Christ's method and

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of Christ's success? How many a one, drawing from afar, has known her first as the refuge of the sinner and thrown himself trustfully into her arms! Terrified by rigor, puzzled by uncertain teaching, shaken by the clash of contending systems, soul after soul, tried, tempted, fallen, all but despairing, has emerged from the strife, weary and sore wounded. Gladly, gratefully, those souls turn toward the figure which has kept watch over humanity through the ages of its devious course, working Christ's work among men, guiding, uplifting, healing, binding up wounds that were nearly fatal, and giving new strength to undertake the struggles still to come.

It has been charged accusingly against the Church that she "hath kept company with sinners;" but this is to her glory rather than her shame. Even so did her Master, the Son of God, receive and eat with them. But neither of her nor of her Founder can it be

said that the work of caring for sinners made it impossible to create saints.

As from the same divine lips which pronounced the pardon of thief and murderer and wicked woman, there came the revelation of a spiritual ideal more divinely ravishing in its purity and beauty than any previously known to man, so, too, she who deserves the reproach of being the Church of sinners, is likewise the fruitful Mother of saints and the world's great guide and teacher of holiness. In court and camp and countingroom, clad in royal robes and kitchen-livery and beggars' rags, we find her holy children. There are men of genius and learning and poetic fire, alongside the ignorant and illiterate; there are statesmen, scientists, recluses, peasants and factory girls, penitent thieves and kings and reclaimed outcasts—and to them all she holds out the guiding-lamp, as they toil steadily up the heights of the sacred mountain. While she is dealing patiently with the weakest sinner and ten-

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derly encouraging him to lift up his heart, she ever hides within her bosom the secret hope that God's mercy will yet bestow on him the grace of heroic sanctity.

For all such as are really penitent, then, no matter how scarlet their sin, nor how frequent their treason, the doctrine of the Church assures a pardon. To weak and half-blind man, as he wages inglorious war against the enemies of his own creating and goes stumbling along a road which has been broken and roughened by his own foolishness, what boon can be greater than to be sure of such an opportunity?

That every man has sinned and that even the just are never far from the danger line, makes doubly necessary the proclamation of a general forgiveness. It is not unusual for some inner convulsion of the soul to send the tide of human courage ebbing out beyond low-water mark; nor for the demon of despair to fasten grimly upon a quaking heart and make it everlast-

ingly his own. Life is so volatile, the spirit is so delicate, men are so loth to renew the endless struggle, to hope in the face of defeat, to try and try and ever try again. Sometimes it may seem more just to be less tender with the sinner; to human wisdom the limit of mercy appears to have been reached. But with God, with Christ, with the Church, with the Church's minister, wheresoever sin hath abounded, there doth grace superabound.

Widespread as the human race and lasting as the life of man upon earth is the Church's care of her charge. Seeking his pleasure by riotous living in a far-off country, still does the sinner fail to outdistance the call of her warning voice. Though he walk in the valley of the shadow of death, he finds she has not abandoned him. Should he descend in his headlong career of wickedness to the very verge of the precipice of hell, even there she is with him, her right hand extending the hope of

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pardon, her voice promising the gift of peace.

To show such inexhaustible patience toward the sinner may seem extreme,—the Puritan and the Pharisee have declared it so. The Church's answer is the answer of Christ: to the lost sheep she is sent, and to them that are sick. The God whose message she preaches is the God of infinite patience and, above all His other works, are His tender mercies. Not to crush the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but to kindle and fan the sacred flame of the heart's contrition—such is her mission. Though her call may fall many a time upon a deafened ear and a hardened heart, yet in the end it may be heard and heeded; and the gain is more than the loss. God's mercy may be abused, it is true; but never is it wasted, if the sinner observes the conditions under which alone the Church promises pardon.

What are these terms which are insisted upon as requisite for the for-

giveness of sin? The same which Christ ever imposed, the terms given to the palsied man in the Gospel: "The soul that has sinned must repent."

The spirit of sorrow must descend upon it; grief must envelop it as a fire and kindle within its dark recesses the blaze of penitent shame. Out from the lips must burst forth the spontaneous cry of the stricken heart: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Acknowledgment of guilt in the face of the world: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee," willingness to disown and repudiate the past, to give a pledge of the future, to attempt a restoration of the ruined order and a renewal of the balance destroyed by sin—all this the Church insists upon as the prerequisite of that forgiveness which shall be ratified in heaven.

Conceivably a sinner may lie to the Holy Ghost, may profess a contrition which he refuses to make interiorly his own, but such a one is surely the exception rather than the rule; he hurts him-

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self alone; and it were not the part of wisdom for the Church, because of him, to exclude from final forgiveness the weakling who, at last effectually repentant, comes craving pardon for the seven-times-seventieth time.

Those who find it hard to see how doctrine affects conduct, or what authority has to do with moral effort, should study with care the Church's theory concerning the means and the extent of forgiveness of sin. To set before one's self a high ideal and to labor in solitary loyalty for its attainment, is necessarily possible to only a few. The rest of us stumble and halt and go lame; we are lost without instruction and aid and encouragement. And it will be found that what men in general need most is just what the Church has to offer.

There are countless multitudes that but for her teaching would never have risen from their falls, nor have found again the narrow way from which, it may be in momentary inattention, they

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had strayed. There have been rare and noble souls entangled in the snare of temptation, the mire of sudden sin, the fatal quicksand of despondency; and by her aid they have been born again to the life of saints and heroes. All such are witnesses to the divine wisdom and the divine power which reach out through the Church's instrumentality to the erring children of men; and in the same spirit and by the same authority as the Christ of the Gospels, proclaim to the stricken of the human race: "Be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee."

CHAPTER XII

Pagan or Christian?

NOTHING in the New Testament is plainer than its condemnation of the world.

The Apostle bids his disciples “be not conformed to this world.” Religion implies the keeping one’s self “unspotted from this world.” The friendship of the world is “the enmity of God.” St. John even says, “If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him.” In numerous passages our Lord insists upon the antagonism between His teaching and that of the world, His interests and those of the world, His spirit and the spirit of the world. In fact, we could almost summarize the Gospel by indicating the various ways in which it attacks and condemns the world.

This fundamental opposition be-

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tween Christianity and worldliness is apparent in the very usage of our own language. To be "worldly" means to be not a Christian. Open the pages of a dictionary. You will find that "worldliness" means the being devoted to, or interested in, the cares and advantages and pleasures of this life to the exclusion of those of the life to come.

The worldling, then, finds his centre of interest, his chief aim, here in the tangible present; all else is subordinate to the supremely important things that he deals with here and now. To acquire what cannot permanently endure, to win what ultimately he must surrender, this is the highest good that the worldling's mind can recognize.

The Christian, on the other hand, is committed to the principle that in case of conflict between the present and the future life, the interests of the latter must always prevail. It is not that the Christian despises the transient goods of the material order, the gifts and

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blessings and privileges of this earth; but he cannot allow them to become his supreme interest. When there is divergence, contrast, opposition, he strives in behalf of the interests of the future life. He resists the encroachments of time upon the domain of eternity. He jealously guards the rights of God; for Heaven is always infinitely preferable to the best that can be offered by earth.

All this is plain, beyond question. The opposition between worldliness and Christianity, the impossibility of making the interests of the present life supreme in the Christian soul, needs only to be stated in order to be accepted. Yet, in practice, with our common human habit of inconsistency, many of us seem continually to deny it. We should frequently examine ourselves on this point, to find if we are honestly entitled to wear the name of Christian, to see if we really are where we belong, to make sure that we do not deserve to be classed with the

worldlings, and excluded with them from the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order fully to appreciate our situation, it may be well first to reflect on the intimacy of our association with the world. As things go now, the Christian is daily forced into close contact with those who personify the pagan spirit. In time of persecution it was not so. When the world was hunting and imprisoning and slaughtering Christians, there was comparatively little danger that the Christians would insensibly acquire the habits of the worldling. But we call ourselves Christians now, without fear of violence. We walk abroad in pagan streets, and breathe pagan air, brush against pagan passers-by, and converse with pagan friends and relatives, read pagan books, listen to pagan lectures, and attend pagan amusements; and we may call ourselves Christians all the while, without even so much as being laughed at.

It is indeed a dangerous situation;

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for to this insidious kind of persuasion human nature most readily yields. So surely as there is magical influence in a constantly repeated example set close before our eyes, so surely will it be difficult for the Christian who lives in uninterrupted friendly communication with the world to remain immune to the deadly infection of its godlessness.

Even a moment's superficial attention to the matter must convince us that our lives lie in circumstances peculiarly dangerous because of the intimacy of our association with the world. It would hardly be too much to affirm that unless we continually arouse and question ourselves, unless we remind ourselves frequently of Christian principles, and apply them to the facts of our daily routine, unless we endeavor over and over again to standardize our conduct by the Gospel, we shall inevitably become secret converts to worldliness, and quite lose the spirit of Christ.

A convincing argument of the grav-
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ity of this danger is the immense number of professing Christians who notoriously have been overcome by the world. In all charity, let us face the facts. Pagan standards replace Christian standards in the public and private behavior of countless professed Catholics. They ape the manners, as they accept the maxims, of the multitudes who acknowledge themselves to be pagans. The motives that actuate the worldly Catholic, the thoughts and desires that fill his soul, the way in which his time is used and his income spent, are too often indistinguishable from those of the out and out pagan.

If the worldly Catholic man is bad, the worldly Catholic woman is surely no better. Unbridled self-indulgence, reckless devotion to fashion, the ambition to shine at any cost—how often as we note these things we can detect no difference between Catholic and pagan women in the worship of false gods. And how often must we rec-

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ognize this pagan spirit in our friends, our relatives, or even members of our own household? When the taint of corruption comes thus close to us, how extremely difficult will be the task of saving ourselves from perversion!

This then is clear—that we need a rare power of vision and a heroic degree of courage in order to escape a fate unfortunately so common. As we recall the fundamental teachings of the Gospel, and then look about to examine the conduct of the Christians who are nearest and dearest to us, we may be startled to see how much and how often we shall have to differ from many a friend and many a relative, if we are to be like what Christ gives us to understand He wishes His followers to be.

To the dull of mind and the weak of heart, the custom of the crowd has ever been the all-sufficient excuse for wrong-doing. There is no teaching of Christ, or of the Church, too

sacred for a majority to change, to attenuate, or to minimize. There is no degree of selfishness not sanctioned by the approval of the many. With sheeplike readiness, the long line follows obediently, turning whithersoever it is led by those in front. Ridiculous though it seems, it is often tragic—the ease with which men and women are brought to deny in act the principles they believe they are honestly professing.

What each one needs, above all other things, is keenness of vision to perceive what is right and true, though a babel of voices be proclaiming the thing that is wrong and false. We are to develop a conscience that will be sensitive to the teaching of the Gospel and the decisions of the Church, and we are to be faithful in recognizing our own inner convictions. We are to acquire the habit of judging by Christian principles, independently of all the worldly-minded who surround us. We are to refuse to twist facts to suit selfish

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convenience, or general demand, or common views. We are to retain the power of vision which lets us perceive the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant or unpopular. This personal moral sense is the very first need of the man or woman who would remain loyal to the Gospel in the midst of a pagan world.

Then, having seen the truth, we must have the heroic courage to do what is right, no matter what friends may think, or the crowd may prefer. This is a hard saying. Perfectly sound instincts within us make us slow to differ from those around us, especially from those we love. There is an honorable kind of reluctance to act oddly. It may be the very shrinking of humility, or of modesty itself, which bids us hesitate. But we must be strong enough to go ahead, nevertheless. When it becomes perfectly plain that the common course of conduct is un-Christian, worldly, pagan, then we

must stand up and depart, walking aside from the crowd.

Thus clearly to perceive and thus bravely to follow Christian principles is absolutely necessary to the health of the soul. If it be also hard, then we must school and prepare ourselves, so as to be ready when the test is given. Such training of our souls is an ever-present duty. Fidelity to it will mean growth in the Christian spirit; carelessness will in all probability entail ultimate disaster.

Now as to our method of training. It will consist largely in accustoming ourselves to look at the things of this present life in the light of eternity; and to deal with them as in eternity we shall wish to have dealt. Many things make a pleasant enough appeal, until we remember how soon we shall be forced to surrender them; many things seem very fair, until we visualize them as they will look to us when we lie on our death-bed waiting for the end.

So, too, there are many duties hard

to perform which grow light when we think of their worth in the life to come, many good deeds that become easy to achieve the instant we relate them to the interests of the hereafter. It is in these habits of thought and action, then, that we must school ourselves, forming the custom of renouncing the thing that will embitter our dying hours and of doing the thing that will make for our eternal welfare.

In the external order there are two virtues to which special attention may here be drawn. They offer large and constant opportunity to the Christian who is endeavoring to train himself in Christian habits of conduct. These are the virtues of charity and of zeal.

For the practice of charity every day will offer numerous chances; some of them chances that nature does not like to take. In our dealing with the members of our immediate family, or in our occasional relations with strangers, we find crowding into the routine of each day, almost of each hour, re-

peated invitations to exercise that wonderful charity which has been from the beginning the distinctive mark of the true followers of Jesus Christ. We do not need to travel far, nor search long, for the benefits that come to the heart filled with Christian love. We have but to live our ordinary life in the unselfish spirit prompted by our Saviour's conduct, and we shall be protected effectually against the assaults of worldliness.

The other virtue which suggests itself is the virtue of zeal. Since the beginning, zeal, too, has been characteristic of the disciples of Christ. They have been unselfishly eager to carry to others the good news of the Gospel. They have braved discomfort, loss, danger, for the sake of introducing God to souls, of winning souls to God. And for the practice of this virtue, also, the ordinary life offers abundant opportunity. Without being in any sense intrusive, or impertinent, we shall find, if we keep our eyes open, that many a

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person is waiting for the word we can speak, for the invitation we can bestow. Sincere zeal in the cause of Christ will be another effectual help against the loss of the spirit of the Gospel.

Interiorly, it is on discipline and on prayer that the emphasis had best be laid. Discipline that is reasonable and sane, may be also consistently firm. Little rules of self-denial, habitual control of emotion and of desire, in accord with definite resolutions dictated by conscience, the acquired facility of relinquishing without complaint this, that, or the other, thing on which our hearts are set—these are practices that will safeguard us against the disease of worldliness, so constant a peril to all.

Then comes prayer. Without prayer we shall neither succeed in the acquisition of virtue nor shall we possess any other protection against the evil we seek to avoid. And prayer, for the purpose now before us, had best be the oft-repeated prayer of the heart lifted up in silent, or almost silent, re-

membrance of the ever-present God, and His all-embracing goodness. To recall that He is with us, to greet Him with a look, a thought, a word, to waft in His direction a loving sentiment, an act of adoration or of thanksgiving, an apology for wrong-doing in the past, or a request for help in the present, or the future—this is a way of filling in the vacant moments of the day which, should it become a habit, will create the supreme joy of life.

It is by fidelity in the practice of virtues such as these that we shall achieve the high heroism which our position calls for.

Let it be recalled again that many a professed Christian is making shipwreck on the rock of worldliness; that near us, among companions, and relatives, and intimate friends, are probably some who carry around wherever they go the infection of a pagan spirit; that nothing but an unusual degree of keenness in perceiving, and strength in executing, the demands of a consistent

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Christian idealism will save us from the dangers that surround us. Hence, we shall have to be ready for many a struggle with our lower natures; but the persistent attempt to be charitable and zealous will prepare us for victory, and the practice of self-discipline and of constant communion with God, will give us the aid which assures success.

Senior Novitiate

CHAPTER XIII

Have Miracles Ceased?

FRQUENTLY our Saviour gave striking manifestations of His divine power. On various occasions and in diverse ways, He exercised His dominion over nature, suspending natural laws and delivering persons who sought His aid from a burden of affliction. At times He went so far in the exercise of beneficent activity as to bring people back to life out of the very grave itself.

Though the more wonderful exhibitions of supernatural power were few, the lesser miracles were well-nigh innumerable. Such deeds as healing the infirm of disease, making the lame to walk, the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, seem to have been an almost ordinary evidence both of His own divine power and of His sympathy for His Father's afflicted children.

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The story of these different miracles of our Lord, impresses us with a keen sense of the difference between that earlier day and our own. Further, it impels many of us to wish we had been alive in the time and place chosen by Providence for the earthly life of the Son of Man. We regret that we have missed the stimulus given to faith by miracles actually witnessed, and the stimulus given to love by miracles personally experienced.

Some of us, indeed, as we reflect on the privilege of the people who lived in Judea in that older time, are apt to feel the stirrings of a difficulty to belief aroused by the fact that the God who was so ready with attention and so quick with aid to sufferers then, should seem so far away and so slow to help nowadays, when we lift up unanswered prayers in the midst of trials intolerable. It is both a disappointment and an objection that the miraculous activities described in the Gospel have

in these latter days so largely disappeared.

However, doubting minds must keep clearly in view the real end of our Lord's mission and the real significance of His miraculous deeds. The purpose of His coming was not mainly the bestowal of temporal blessings upon His followers, but their spiritual illumination.

Temporal blessings, it is true, were the gifts that the carnal-minded looked forward to; and failure to secure such blessings was the usual reason for our Lord's rejection by those who turned aside from Him. But if there was anything especially clear and emphatic in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, it was this, that His followers were to expect hardship and suffering when they undertook to follow Him. The Disciples of Christ had been led to anticipate, and in the subsequent course of history actually did receive not less, but more, of poverty and pain.

Although there was, so to speak, a

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background of miraculous relief of sufferings—as if to provide faith with a support which would endure through long ages and through violent storms—such relief was not the common experience, it was not the daily bread and meat of Christian life. Taken all in all, grief and pain and death usually went unrelieved; the ordinary course of nature persisted; and the instances of miraculous response and interference, compared with the instances of seemingly unanswered prayer, were as millions to units. It was certainly not for the sake of bestowing material benefits that Christ came upon earth; and it was certainly not by the eager desire to witness wonders that the Christian showed himself a true disciple of his Master.

Fundamental in the religion preached by Jesus Christ is His purpose to save the spirit by the crucifixion of the flesh. No teaching could be more forcible, no example more impressive, than that which was placed

irremovably before the eyes of the human race, when the agony of three long hours was terminated by the dreadful death upon the Cross. Calvary gives the measure and spells out the meaning of the Christian revelation. It blazes the way of salvation for the multitudes who are to follow with bleeding feet in the footprints of the Man of Sorrows up to the very portals of Paradise. It sets the goal of virtue and the aim of prayer in the distant shadows of the eternal years.

Not by peace and plenty upon earth is the ambition of the saint satisfied. Not in deliverance from suffering is the sure mark of divine favor found. Not in the realization of any human hope, or in the receipt of any temporal or material blessing, or in the accumulation of the goods and prizes of this present life, does the Christian find his reward. Rather are Christ's followers to be recognized as truly His by their patient endurance of suffering, their spirit of renunciation, their ready

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abandonment of the present for the sake of the future.

Visible blessings bestowed on us come, as it were, by chance, and indirectly; we have received no pledge or promise with regard to them. Whether this or that gift would tend to our good or ill is oftentimes a secret known only to God; and we dare not ask for it except with the reservation that it be withheld, if incompatible with God's purpose. But at least we may be infallibly sure that the faithful following of the Master's will must ultimately meet with reward—a reward exceeding great, beyond all human power to estimate, enduring and everlasting as God Himself. It is for the sake of a return such as this that wisdom bids us renounce the things of earth, and abandon private, selfish, sinful aims absolutely and forever.

This great lesson on the supreme aspiration of man and the divinely appointed means for its attainment, Christ taught clearly during the short

span of years that He dwelt visibly here. Having planted the tiny mustard seed, He withdrew, leaving to men its cultivation. Gradually the centuries unfold its possibilities; gradually it is transformed into the mighty, visible Kingdom of God. One after another the early promises are realized; one after another Christ's words and principles are understood in their profounder meaning.

So, too, as the individual Christian advances in the life of virtue, he appreciates the value of the spiritual as over against the material. More and more he perceives that the temporal blessings bestowed by Christ upon His own generation were but little things when compared to the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the Church, to be by her in turn imparted to men until the end of time.

Thus it is with the miracles related in the Gospel. That the string of a dumb man's tongue should be loosed and the gift of speech be received by

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one who had never uttered an articulate sound, was a wonder great enough to excite the marvel of the people, and significant enough to deserve to be recorded by the Evangelist. But the man who studies the result of Christianity upon human conduct as a whole, or who appreciates the influence of Christ's grace upon the inner life of his own conscience, will quickly understand that greater miracles than giving speech to the dumb are daily recorded in the long story of God's gracious dealings with the souls our Saviour redeemed.

In all ages and among all races, the deaf have been made to hear and the dumb to speak. Men who were as stones in their irresponsiveness, who would turn away from the message of an angel, who seemed destined to remain criminal and heedless until death,—men like these have been made to hear and to obey the gentle persuasion of the Saviour's voice. They have grown, by His miraculous healing, sen-

sitive beyond belief to the slightest whispers of the Holy Spirit, docile and zealous in the performance of every sort of unselfish and virtuous deed.

Surely it is no less a miracle to give hearing to the soul than to the flesh; it is more of a blessing that a hardened sinner should become heedful of God's warning voice than that his ears should be unstopped. The power to hear physical sounds is a lesser gift, and its bestowal upon a man born deaf a lesser wonder than the grace given to a sensual and vicious spirit, wrapped in the bondage of sin, and deafened by the loud noise of worldly pleasure, when such a one is led to understand and adopt the most lofty and heroic ideals which the mind of man has ever known. Who that reads a little of the history of Christ's grace will deny that miracles like these happen over and over again in this very day and this very land in which we live!

And then there are the dumb who are made to speak. That to a grown man

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there should be given or restored the faculty of speech is without doubt a marvel. But that tongues and lips which never uttered aught but foulness and blasphemy should be converted into organs through which the Spirit of God discourses heavenly music, this indeed, beyond question, would be a greater miracle.

Yet we know, many of us by immediate experience, that in this sense, too, God's grace is wonderfully active. Those who scoffed have learned to pray. They who were the promoters and the propagandists of awful wickedness have become the messengers of Christ's glad tidings and the zealous preachers of the grace of God. It is among the most evident proofs of the Church's divine origin that so often by means of her Sacraments, healing graces such as these are distributed to the wretched children of men.

There is, then, no lack of opportunity for us who live at this long distance of time from Christ's own generation.

We have, if we will but examine it, strong evidence of His beneficent activity and His divine power here among us, day after day.

We ourselves may become recipients of His healing, soothing, uplifting grace; we may win His blessings for those needy ones who are dear to us; we may help the deaf to hear with distinctness, and the dumb to speak sweetly and clearly. Often, as we stand near and watch, He raises the dead to life. The wonders we see may not be done in the same fashion as the wonders of the Gospel; but they are none the less marvelous and none the less true.

It becomes us not therefore, to dream of what might have been, had we lived in another age and another place. Rather let us make ourselves familiar with and responsive to our own opportunities. Otherwise we shall miss the greater gifts, while wishing idly for the lesser. Here and now, amid the circumstances where our lot is cast by Providence, our chance of heaven must

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be sought; it is the graces actually offered us that present our best possibility of perfection.

Those of us who are wise, then, will make much of our actual spiritual privileges. Instead of regretting that Christ's visible presence is no longer continued here upon earth, we shall open our eyes to gifts bestowed upon us which are greater than the gift of Christ's visible presence. Calling upon Him to open our spiritual eyes, and unlock our soul's tongues, and unstop the deafness of our spirit, we shall surely receive from Him the grace that most we need. Having corresponded with the given help, we shall achieve wondrous results.

And at last we shall come to understand that we missed no supreme blessing by being born just when and where we have been born, or by being placed in circumstances which actually make up our lot. God's grace, united with our efforts, will carry us happily to our destiny; and from the gates of eternity

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we shall look back with gladness upon the days and the conditions of our earthly life, and bear witness to His wisdom and His goodness, crying out joyfully: "He hath done all things well."

CHAPTER XIV

Do the Dead Live?

THE best index to a man's mind is his conduct. Watch the behavior of your friend when at work; watch him in his leisure hours; watch him when he is crossed, or tempted, or tired, or defeated, or triumphant. You will thus learn more about the excellences and the defects of his character, the trend of his thoughts, the nature of his ambitions, the probability of his success, than could be gathered from his sincerest attempt to analyze for you his mental and moral disposition.

So it is with an organization of men. So it is therefore with the Church, formed to conserve and to declare and to apply the truth delivered by Christ. Watch her conduct. Mark the purpose of her feasts, and the manner in which

she celebrates them. Note her ways of developing spiritual life in the soul. Observe her practical bearing toward the great haunting facts of human experience — growth, responsibility, temptation, sin, death. Thus you will learn much more about her real self than you could hope to obtain from the most minute study of her definitions and professions of faith.

Now, on All Souls' Day, as it is called, the Catholic Church makes a rather extraordinary manifestation of her mind. With very unusual insistence she then summons the faithful to remember and to assist their brethren who are dead. Unique in Office and in Mass, is her Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed.

On our imaginations the Liturgy then imprints the pictures of those who, going before us into the valley of the shadow, have passed away in the friendship of Christ. There is general mourning. The wide world witnesses one great universal funeral service.

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The chant is a solemn dirge; the prayer begs the gift of eternal rest and perpetual light for the souls of the blessed dead; the Mass is the Mass of Requiem.

Nowhere within the far-stretching borders of her domain, will living man be utterly forgetful of the dead that day. Among all nations and in every place there will be offered the sacrifice of propitiation for the past sins and frailties of those who have died in the Lord. Graves will be visited. You will see a tear of remembrance on the mother's face. The father will kneel down to pray again at the grave of his son. The widow of twenty years ago will visit the tomb of her husband and murmur the prayer of a love not yet grown cold. For these are children of a Mother who teaches that "it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead."

All this implies that a bond wonderfully firm and wonderfully lasting knits together those that have gone and those

that still remain; that there is a union between souls which the power of death is helpless to destroy.

That there is purgation after death, that souls passing out of this life with even the slightest moral taint must suffer an experience of purifying pain—this doctrine is the basis of the Catholic observance of All Souls' Day.

How reasonable it appears to the Christian mind! The best of us are imperfect, and the purest somewhat stained. Those we love and revere most, those we deem worthy of the highest gifts of earth, the men and women who shine out as leaders of the strong and saviours of the weak, even they do not seem holy as God is holy. Some lurking flaw, some almost invisible defect, some lingering imperfection clings to the most perfect of them. One alone is good—God!

Even though we are lying stunned under the shock of a dear one's death, even though we are crying out in wild protest against the decree which has

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snatched away a life unreservedly heavenly in its influence on our own— even then, we have but to gaze for an instant toward the all perfect God, and at once we realize that our purest and our noblest and our best beloved are weak and faulty in His sight, and that all humankind needs mercy and pardon and the grace of divine forgiveness.

And how consoling is the doctrine which enables us to reconcile our keen appreciation of God's ineffable sanctity with the conviction that those we love shall yet enter into His presence and be made one with Him. How uplifting is the faith which gives us reason to believe that some mysterious process purges and refines the souls of the beloved dead until they become fit to repose in the bosom of the All Holy, where defilement and imperfection are inconceivable.

Again, what a blessed thing it is that we who remain behind are able to help those who have gone before. Is there any deeper instinct than that to which

this ability affords satisfaction? When they have passed out of sight and no visible bond unites us to them, the purity of our affection is actually an aggravation of our pain. We are well nigh crazed at being so distant and so helpless, and sometimes even self-destruction would seem inviting to us in the madness of our grief. But who shall describe our happiness, if there come to us a divine messenger to whisper of the dear one dead, to assure us he is within the shadow of the throne of God, to tell us even that we may help him.

And this is the second belief implied in the Commemoration of All Souls'—that we who still abide in the flesh may, by our prayers and good deeds, aid those who have gone before.

When all has been said, was there ever a generation more irrepressibly human than our own? Men were sterner in the days of old, and more brave perhaps. They bore pain better, they faced death with greater readiness,

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and they shuddered less at torture and at blood. But one cannot believe that they loved more deeply or that they felt the shock of separation more keenly than we. Women clung around their dead, it is true, in the ages gone by ; and strong men often wept over the graves of children ; and on each generation, as it passed away, there were laid the tokens of lasting remembrance and imperishable affection. But out of the very strength our ancestors possessed, it would seem, there must have sprung a greater power of resistance than that which nature gives to us.

Whether that be so or not, this at least is clear, that we nowadays are totally incapable of bearing death's cruel blows without the assistance of religion. Our dead belong to us and we refuse to believe that we have been forever separated or that we are helpless to do aught for them. Almost as if in reply to an imperious demand of ours the Church's voice declares "the

prayers of the living avail to aid the souls of them that are dead."

It is wide in its sweep, this principle of Catholic teaching. It proclaims that there are no walls of partition between the souls of the just, either on this side of the tomb or beyond.

There is one wonderful body, one Kingdom of God. Through every region of it, militant, suffering, triumphant, course life-giving currents of common sympathy and common grace. Part is closely bound to part; and neither sorrow, nor pain, nor death can dissolve the strong bond of fellowship uniting member with member. As the Christian can never rejoice, so he can never suffer, entirely alone. Whether he lives or whether he dies, he is a member of Christ's Body, so to remain throughout eternity.

This Catholic conception of solidarity is immeasurably beyond the highest hope of humanitarianism. In contrast with ambition and selfishness, it sets up the divinely beautiful ideal

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of charity. It reveals in the soul of the Christian a depth and a constancy of affection such as reason of itself could neither anticipate nor comprehend. It preaches the interdependence of man with man so impressively that the poorest cannot excuse himself by pleading inability to aid, nor can the strong soul say to the weak, "I have no need of thee." When the Hand of the Lord has touched us, then we are glad to call any man friend ; we beseech each passer-by to have pity on us ; and we no longer feel it beneath our dignity to beg for a drop of cooling water from the beggar who once lay at our gates.

Looking forward to a condition of helpless suffering as the inevitable, even though temporary, lot of all who finally enter the approaches of eternal life, the Catholic learns valuable lessons about human equality. He perceives how literally and how strikingly God puts down the mighty and exalts the humble. He understands how intimate a sympathy pervades the hu-

man members of Christ's Body. And though we dare not say that always and in all circumstances this lesson is assimilated by the individual Catholic, we can assert, without fear of challenge or denial, that the teaching in question is a strong influence for good in the lives of those who appreciate its implications and follow the impulses it suggests.

We who believe this teaching of the Church, then, can say, without a shadow of insincerity:

“Those we love truly never die.”

In reinforcement of our nature's aspiration there comes the solemn pronouncement of the defining Church, purifying and ennobling our purest and noblest loves, until the sacred influence of a union transcending time and space and the things of the flesh brings into our lives something of the peace and holiness of heaven. Amid cries of lamentation there resounds again an echo of the promise, “He shall not taste death forever.”

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Supported on the broad bosom of the Church, which defies the power of death, we feel comforted and consoled amid the heaviest of human afflictions. Permeated with a sense of those wholesome teachings which are held up for our careful study, we are able to shape our souls into at least a rough conformity with the spirit of Christ and to bow resignedly to God's judgments.

Although the effect of the Church's teaching in this matter be not plain in the life of each one of her children, yet, on the whole, the general consequence of her influence is easily discernible. Who else is so brave as the Catholic at the approach of death, so reverent at the awful moment when the soul departs, so tender and so constant in the care of the mortal frame which has been the dwelling place of a still living soul? Who else remembers the dead as the Catholic does? What other mourner possesses ties so consoling and so intimate as the Catholic praying for his beloved?

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It has been given to this generation to witness some very striking instances of human craving for communion with the dead. To wish for an assurance that the dead are still *our* dead, to seek hungrily for a way of reaching out beyond the intolerable confines of this petty world, to long with quenchless longing that some act of ours may avail to satisfy some desire of theirs—these are the yearnings common to all on whom bereavement lays its heavy hand.

Spiritism in its thousand forms is an attempt to meet this real need. But spiritism has not been justified in its results, nor can it ever be more than a poor substitute for that wholesome consolation which has always been within the reach of the Catholic Christian.

Here again we have an instance of what the Church does for her children so many times and in such various ways —she realizes the ideal, she makes concrete and tangible and attainable what mystic and poet have dreamed and

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sung about for ages. That quenchless desire of noblest natures to commune with and to assist the departed is not only recognized by the Church, but met and satisfied.

Look around, and on every hand you will see men and women whose aspirations have been guided, as they have been ennobled, by this teaching of the Catholic religion; for generous response to the Church's suggestion ever brings practical definite moral benefit. Often our eyes are lifted from the trying scenes of earth to that province of Christ's Kingdom which lies beyond; often the music of invisible choirs imparts to us a thrill of inspiration; often we are strengthened and saved by the conviction that the thoughts we conceive and the deeds we do will affect not only our own private destiny, but the happiness of those who have gone before.

Senior Stowitiae

Senior Novitiate

Senior Novitiate

